JUNE
30th
1925
25c

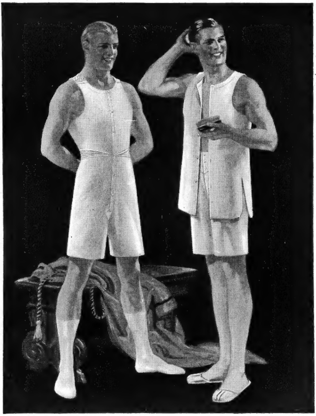
THREE TIMES A MONTH

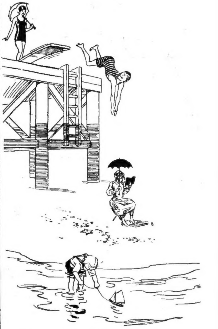
Adventure

Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur
Georges Surdez
Charles Victor Fischer
Alex McLaren
Hugh Pendexter
Alan LeMay
George Bruce Marquis
F. St. Mars
Erle D. Hosmer

---

3 Complete Novelettes





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"Looking for the label" *after* you're sorry won't change it to "B.V.D."!

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ADVENTURE
June 30th, 1925

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 53
Number 3

Stamp out Typhoid!

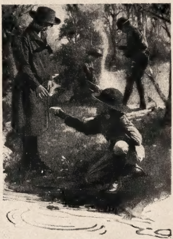
"IF only we had known!" Over and over again these words of helpless self-reproach echo in the hearts of those whose loved ones were taken from them by diseases now known to be preventable.

Perhaps in your own circle some one was stricken with typhoid fever—that sinister disease which comes without warning and strikes with deadly force, which spares neither rich nor poor, high nor low, young nor old, which so often leaves its victims physically bankrupt and subject to other ailments.

Typhoid fever is a disease of filth caused by a germ that is taken into the body through the mouth. The germ is conveyed into the intestines where it rapidly multiplies, sets up inflammation and creates a poison that floods the body. Sewage-contaminated water, unclean milk, shell-fish from polluted water, uncooked vegetables, house flies—all of these may carry typhoid. That is why it is so important that rigid supervision of water, milk and food supplies be maintained in every section of our country. *There need never be another epidemic of typhoid fever.* Science has bestowed a wonderful blessing in offering protection from typhoid. This merciless disease can be made as rare as yellow fever. Inoculation by means of a simple injection of vaccine under the skin will in most cases prevent typhoid. The injection is repeated at intervals of a week until three treatments have been given. No scar is left. In the rare cases where typhoid is contracted, even after inoculation, this protection makes the siege much less severe.

Campers, hikers, vacationists and all persons who are traveling, as well as those who regularly eat in public places should be the first to be inoculated against typhoid.

It is true that at times people who are exposed to typhoid do not contract it. They are temporarily immune. But it is *never* safe to take immunity for granted. *Be inoculated and advise others to protect themselves.* Could you ever excuse yourself had you advised a friend against inoculation who subsequently contracted the disease? Make an appointment with your doctor for yourself and all your family. Avoid danger so far as possible regarding what you eat and drink.



DANGER!

THIS is the sort of thing that may mean typhoid fever for the whole family—a satisfying drink of cold, sparkling water that came from no-one-knows-where!

It is never safe to drink from any wayside streams or strange wells. Typhoid inoculation offers immunity to most people for two or three years, but to be absolutely safe, unknown water must be boiled.

Inoculation also tends to protect you from the danger of contracting typhoid right in your own home. In many cities the Health Department gives such inoculations free.

Household helpers who are "typhoid carriers" have been known to infect entire families.

Inoculation against typhoid has no relation to vaccinations for smallpox and diphtheria. It is an added health protection.

THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

Typhoid fever kills one out of every ten persons who have it. Those who recover are left in such a weakened condition that for three years following, the death rate among such persons is twice the normal rate.

Wherever cities protect their drinking supply from sewage or purify the water by chlorination the death-rate from typhoid drops. A marked reduction also takes place in communities where milk and food supplies are carefully protected and food handlers thoroughly inspected.

The value of typhoid inoculation was proved during the World War. Inoculation of our four million men was compulsory. In France and in our training camps at home there was practically no typhoid in our ranks.

Contrast this with the records of the Spanish-American War. There *one* out of every *five* contracted the disease.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will be glad to mail its booklet, "The Conquest of Typhoid Fever" to all who are interested in stamping out this disease.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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June 30 1925
Vol LIII No 3

Published Three Times a Month by The Ridgway Company

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C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy geographical sub-divisions, with special section on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

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Cover Design . . . . **J. W. Schlaikjer**

A New Serial and Three Complete Novelettes

Photograph by Bachrach

LEONARD H. NASON

HUGH BANCROFT of Ligoniers needed a horse. Now getting what he wanted was a habit of *Hugh's* though all the Austrian forces should say him nay. *Hugh* got his horse, and other things he hadn't bargained for. The first instalment of Leonard H. Nason's new serial, "THE BOLD DRAGOON," dealing with the War of the Austrian Secession, will be in the next issue.

WHEN *Luther Fox* set out to get a man he let nothing stand in his way, but he made a mistake when he tried to use *Shorty Carroway* and *Tad Ladd* in his underhanded plans. "PAID OFF," a complete novelette of the cattle country, by Walter J. Coburn, is in the next issue.

ELEPHANT JOE'S mandolin was enough to content the gang of South Sea beachcombers until the lure of wealth and Sydney pubs led them into Dutch territory. "THE KING OF THE BEACHCOMBERS" is a complete novelette by Frederick Moore in the next issue.

YOUNG *Stevens* wondered who the strangely dressed youth leading the revolutionists was. He found out, and to his sorrow. "EL CARCEL," a complete novelette by John Murray Reynolds, will appear in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one

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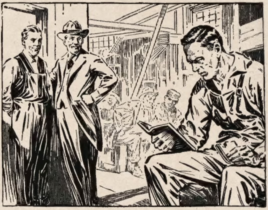

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And let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-17, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

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THERE *are many delicious ways of eating yeast —dissolved in water, fruit juices or milk, spread on crackers, or eaten plain.*

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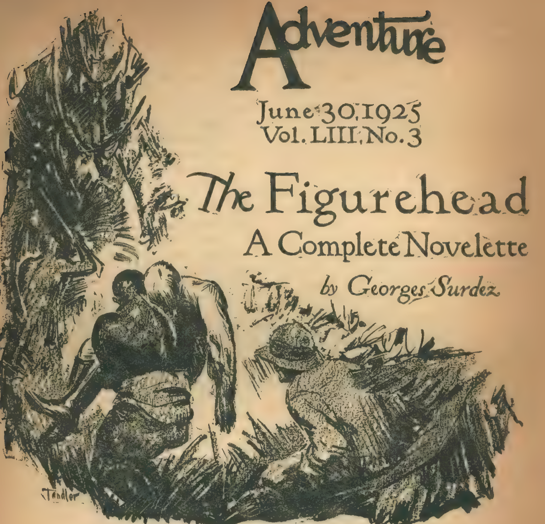
MRS. MARGARET ADE SWEENEY, Roxbury, Mass.

"I AM A HOSTESS at a hotel and not a day passes that someone doesn't ask me how I manage to be up late at night and out in the sun every day and still keep my skin so clear and fair and my eyes so bright. My answer is Fleischmann's Yeast. Years of intestinal indigestion had brought me to the point where I determined I'd stick at it until I got relief. Three cakes of yeast dissolved in water became a daily rite. In three months I had the results I wanted—relief from indigestion, gas and chronic constipation." MRS. GERTRUDE W. HOOD, Mount Lowe, Calif.

Adventure

June 30, 1925
Vol. LIII, No. 3



The Figurehead

A Complete Novelette

by Georges Surdez

Author of "Sudanese Trails," "The Tool of Allah," etc.

RAOUL FAREL passed through the arched gateway and entered the spacious opening between the inner and outer walls of Kita. Before him, the crowd moved back respectfully.

"I sakhoma, m'pha!"

"M' aharba!" Farel replied. The greeting, the quick answer, seemed as familiar to him as French.

Makam Tiaba, who had just spoken, saluted, stretched his hand in indication.

"Thou hast come to see the bearers, Lieutenant?" he asked. "They are here."

Preceding the sergeant, Farel approached a group of men, sixty or more, squatting in a semicircle before smoldering fires. Makam Tiaba had recruited them personally. They were not the untrustworthy forced laborers of the average expedition, but free men, carefully selected, and attracted by Farel's prestige.

"Woulil" ordered Tiaba. "Arise!"

The bearers obeyed. Farel greeted them in a few words. They chorused their answer, and the oldest of the number expressed delight at this chance to serve him. Farel inspected them from head to foot, each in turn. Tiaba had made a good choice, not a man could be rejected.

"Good, Tiaba, good men."

"They wish to know when thou wilt leave," the sergeant stated.

"Tomorrow at dawn. Are the *Tirailleurs* ready, also?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. I show thee."

Tiaba led the way.

The soft red glow of the brief sunset fell

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upon the town, the straw-roofed huts huddled within the white walls of clay and masonry, walls punctuated every hundred yards by squat massive watch towers. Looming over the whole, the glistening tiles of the central building of the French fort held the light. On either side the rugged flanks of rust-colored mountains loomed to the purplish sky, crisscrossed by a magnificent patchwork of blue-black shadows. Raoul Farel was again swept by the stark, raw beauty of Kita.

The swarming blacks, in gaudy garments, moved like ants on a disturbed hill; the lithe women, wrapped in gaily striped *boubous*, bulky burdens on their heads and fat babies astride their hips, unexpected highlights in their rounded shoulders, shoulders almost as muscular as those of the men; the stately strut of a wealthy trader; occasionally, the broad, blue-clad shoulders of a *Tirailleur* of the garrison, pushing his way through the throng, grinning face under the red *chechia* —all these formed many minute pictures, when the eye, tired of immensity, sought detail.

Colors, smells, sounds, an orgy of sensations assailing at one time all the senses. The feel of the elastic turf underfoot. The voices of the crowd swelling into a cataract of noise, pierced by the shriller wails of the peddlers, as the roar of the torrent is punctured by the splash of drops.

The mighty fascination of Africa was still strong upon Farel, as strong as on the day he had landed in Dakar, three years before. The old lure, the longing for the hot and brilliant sun persisted unabated. Men said that the air was miasmatic, the climate debilitating. Air and climate were tonic to him. The knowledge that tomorrow he would plunge deeper into the heart of the Sudan thrilled him anew.

He glanced at his hands, tanned, hairy. They appeared too powerful, too capable to be his. Arriving in the Sudan in his twenty-third year, he had grown an inch in height and had gained pounds in weight. Between Kayes and Kita he had found himself. His nebulous ideas had become fixed into a fanatical love for the country. Farel loved the Sudan as men love women.

Dimly he imagined that he had lived in Africa before, in some bygone age. How else explain his feeling that he had never really lived until he had stepped on the soil? The scenes, the customs, the languages, never struck him with surprize. Why did the sonorous syllables of the dialects ring in his ears with the tantalizing, elusive sound of tongues once well known and merely forgotten?

His *Tirailleurs*, their minds unclouded, perhaps, by the sceptical teachings of civilization, expressed aloud what he had vaguely believed—

"Thou art one of us, Lieutenant, though Allah granted thee a white skin."

He did not resent this assimilation by an inferior race. Aware of his white blood, he was nevertheless proud of his grip on his negro followers. He was glad of their loyalty and approval.

He now found his *Tirailleurs* in line for inspection, eighty-five picked men. Arms and equipment were in perfect condition.

Good men and reliable, recruited from the same group of villages, all were more or less related by those complicated ramifications of relationship fully understood only by the blacks. Farel had learned that men born in the same village could supply more effort than a heterogeneous aggregation composed of different races. To distinguish them at roll call he had been compelled to number them. Makam Tiaba the sergeant, answered to "Tiaba Number One." The seven other Tiabas in the unit bore other numbers. For practical use this scant company was worth more than three outfits of the same size.

"Everything is well," declared Farel in conclusion. "Tomorrow we start for Boure."

Boure, the Land of Gold, the richest province in the Sudan where, even with the primitive methods of the natives, Samory had formerly collected a yearly tribute of one hundred thousand francs in gold dust on the yield of the placers. Boure, the fertile land on the banks of the Niger—*Dialiba*, the "Great River" of the Malinkes.

France was at peace with Samory, Emperor of the Ouasoulou, who called himself *almany*, chief of the Malinkes, Commander of the Faithful. Farel, no more than any one else, was deceived by this temporary truce. The issue must be settled. Either Samory must be removed from his throne, or the French must abandon their conquest. There was no room for two masters, and Samory intended to remain master in fact as well as in name. Farel knew that the negro leader was but biding his time to obtain modern rifles from Sierra Leone. There, the Rolland Company, and the West African Coal Company waxed rich selling him weapons.

But there was little likelihood that Samory would be ready for an attack on the French before Farel's return to Kita at the start of the rainy season. Arms and ammunition must be transported on foot from the seacoast to Bissandougou, capitol of the Ouasoulou.

Officially, Farel's mission was topographical. He was to check the map drawn by Major Delaneau a few years previously, the chart of the network of trails that pass by Kita toward the Niger. The lieutenant had a solid reputation in that line of work.

Like many officers in the service, Farel had a hobby, a passion. His special "bug" was ethnography, the study of races. A dozen articles had been published under his name in the *Revue Coloniale* and had met with appreciation from the few specialists. In the Boure Farel expected to learn much. He was taking several Malinke interpreters, well-educated men, as education is esteemed in the region. They knew the traditions, the legends of the tribes Farel would come in contact with. Through them the lieutenant hoped to be able to reconstruct the shadowy history of the blacks.

WHEN he reentered his room to conclude his packing, his "boy" handed him two letters.

"Orderly bring 'em; says they came today from Kayes."

Official envelops from headquarters; Farel regarded them dubiously. Orders before departure might mean that his trip was canceled, and the prospect of a monotonous stay in garrison before him. This would not be the first time an officer was halted at the last moment. His careful plans, necessitated by the movement of nearly two hundred men through a savage land would go for nothing.

He opened the first envelop.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed, adding unflattering remarks about the meddlesome fools responsible for the delay. The paper was an order to postpone his departure until further notice.

Farel passed to the second message, hoping to find a permit to go ahead, a contradiction of the first. It was a letter from Combeau, the colonel commanding the French forces in the Sudan.

My dear Farel:

You have received an order to remain in Kita. At the last minute I decided to give you a companion—two months on the trail alone is not good for any man. You may go ahead as soon as he reaches Kita.

"Probably wishing some ass on me," Farel grumbled, and then read on.

You are probably aware that your official mission in the Boure is but one reason for your trip. I think that the legislators in Paris will soon come to the conclusion that we must either retire from the field or go ahead. I do not doubt but that the second course will be decided upon. Then our columns must advance through the very territory you will cover. I want a careful report of conditions south of Niagassola. I want to know in advance the attitude of the village chiefs toward us. It will be valuable to know where our friends are, and where Samory's friends remain loyal to him.

Your knowledge of natives, your ability to speak the common dialects, the prestige of your military record in the last campaigns, all assure me that I could not have made a better choice. A few judicious promises, tactful handling of the leaders, will pave the way for us, and save lives.

Your companion has been highly recommended to me. He seems alert, intelligent. Although your equal in rank, I have made it perfectly clear to him that he will be under your orders. Permit me to tell you that I am prompted by the thought that he could not have a better mentor than yourself in this land. The petty bickerings that occasionally arise between commanders are impossible between you, as he was a classmate of yours at Saint-Cyr. You remember him no doubt, Gustave Champdor.

Best of luck. Cordially,

G. Combeau.

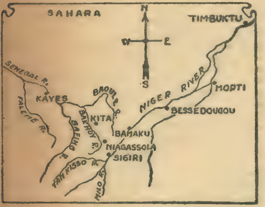
Champdor! He recalled a large, noisy, blond fellow. Flunked regularly in mathematics at Saint-Cyr, the military academy. Popular with a certain set, rather dull-witted on serious matters, Champdor prided himself on being intellectual. Old military family, maternal uncle a general, his father some sort of secretary in the war ministry; rumor said that Champdor had passed through school mainly on outside pull. A nice chap to take along!

"There goes my enjoyment," concluded Farel, tossing the letters on the table.

He wondered whether Combeau had not given in under pressure from Champdor's high-placed protectors, and assigned the new man to the Boure Mission to give him a chance to distinguish himself at Farel's expense.

Farel had a momentary impulse to spring out, order *Tirailleurs* and bearers on the trail, and disappear before Champdor's arrival. He might have carried out this scheme had he been dealing with any one but Combeau. Past performance, good character would weigh nothing in the balance if Farel went against orders.

He sat before his table in blank dismay until he was summoned to the mess-room for the evening meal. The three officers composing the staff of the Kita garrison chaffed him about his downcast appearance, and he found it difficult to refrain from giving vent to legitimate indignation.



"I'm getting a new man," he announced. "Recent arrival."

The others regarded him in pity.

"Well, that's life. We must take the bad with the good," was offered as consolation.

He spent a bad night.

SHORTLY before noon Champdor arrived.

The newcomer's genuine joy at being with a former classmate, his ready smile, for the moment dispelled Farel's premonitions. Champdor apologized for the delay he had occasioned, and wished to start out immediately. Farel protested that a day's rest was necessary so that he might recover from the long trip from Kayes.

"I presume you think I'm a —— nuisance," Champdor declared. "I don't fit in. Green, you know."

"Forget it, we all have to start." Farel cut him short. "I'm glad it's you instead of some one else. But what brought you out here? I thought you had entered the line infantry?"

"I did. Good little hole, too. Regular comic-opera garrison—major with a funny wife—but my father demanded my transfer to the naval infantry. You know, he thinks that it's the place for quick promotion."

"Many are under that delusion," Farel admitted drily. "You find it pretty dull out here, eh?"

"Well," Champdor pondered, "I can't exactly say that. It's interesting—the blacks, you know. But a chap soon becomes tired of it, don't you think?"

"At times," Farel agreed.

They walked from the fort to inspect the *Tirailleurs*. Farel was curious to see what impression Champdor would make upon them.

"What sort of a hole are we going to?"

"Boure territory. Natives call it the 'land of gold.'" He smiled. "The right place for you—suits your name."

Champdor, in French, means "gold field." Champdor's sense of humor reacted favorably. He laughed loudly.

"That's a good one, Farel, a good one! Say, I hear you're getting educated down here. I saw one of your articles."

"Bits of information I pick up here and there."

Champdor rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"That's right," he said.

Before the *Tirailleurs*, Champdor came to a halt.

"That your sergeant?" He indicated Makam Tiaba, dominating the line. "Looks strong. Those queer marks on his face make him seem savage."

Makam Tiaba, good Bambara, bore the tribal marks, the broad scars, three on each cheek from corner of eye to corner of mouth. The truth was these scars created a mask far from reassuring even in repose. Farel chuckled when he imagined Champdor's comment should he ever see Makam in action. Also he wondered what the new white man's reaction would be when, knowing the black better, he would discover the tenderness of feeling hidden beneath the fierce front.

"They all look good," commented Champdor.

"They'll do," Farel admitted.

Champdor, timidly as child handing an orange to an elephant, circled the big Bambara. Makam Tiaba, abashed by the scrutiny, remained as if hewed from black marble. Finally Champdor addressed him in his precise French. Tiaba, deeply embarrassed by his failure to understand, looked helplessly at Farel who, taking pity on both, translated.

"Use few words, simplify your language," he advised Champdor. He gave a few commonplace expressions in illustration. "Try them now."

Champdor, with a sheepish grin, obeyed. Makam, relieved, answered. Champdor passed on to others.

Farel, who knew every reaction of his men, was bewildered. One and all, from Makam Tiaba, sergeant, to Samadin, the "little elephant," diminutive private, the soldiers appeared to like Champdor. Makam removed the last doubt.

"He good white man."

The stamp of approval was placed on Champdor by the most exacting member of the company! A thing for which white men sometimes worked for years without attaining it. Farel could not understand. Stories that had floated about in the classrooms at Saint-Cyr came to his mind. Champdor was the possessor of a weird charm. Not being subject to it himself, he had disbelieved. And now came the proof.

"Catch nice hair," went on Makam, sentimentally, referring to Champdor.

"The —— if I thought Tiaba inclined to the appreciation of manly beauty!" thought Farel.

Interested in spite of himself he regarded Champdor with attention. Tall, slim of waist, broad of shoulder, his behavior was that of a man in good physical condition. His body was that of an athlete. Naturally, to men who associated courage with strength and size, Champdor, with his great stature, his tremendous vitality, seemed heroic.

"Catch good eyes, too," Makam, mistaking silence for approval was adding to his reasons for liking Champdor.

Nice hair, nice eyes—Farel began to understand. Champdor was an unusual type to negroes. His extreme blondness, his fresh, rosy skin and lilac-blue eyes, fascinated the men. If Farel had not shied at the word applied to a man, Champdor might be called beautiful. The lieutenant realized that his own dusky, tanned face could not cause the admiration that the resplendant pigmentation of his friend occasioned.

Champdor was returning from the end of the line, smiling.

"Queer fellows. I like them, though. Primitive, of course." He paused abruptly. "Say, Farel, what could I do to—to—in a way—celebrate my arrival? I want them to like me, you understand?"

"If you have any spare cash, buy them some extra food. Two or three lambs, kola nuts. It's not necessary, or even customary, but if you care to——"

"Sure, I care to!" Champdor fumbled in his pockets, drew out a handful of silver, gave it to Makam Tiaba. "Here, Sergeant, plenty sheep—eat."

Without knowing why, Farel found his ill humor growing. What a strange development! Champdor, the pleasure loving young man, was quite capable of winning the affection of the *Tirailleurs*. Also the newcomer's exuberance irked him. He did not realize that this very exuberance, the boyish enthusiasm, was the chief cause of Champdor's instant leap to popularity. Childish themselves, given to open manifestation of feelings, the Bambaras liked the lieutenant's ways.

In the messroom that night Farel's wonder increased.

Champdor, with his stock of anecdotes fresh from Paris, his fluent talk of horse racing, politics and women, his easy wit, was naturally the center of attention. This was to be expected. Anything that broke the monotony was welcome at the post. But Champdor held more than attention. He was liked. The sober-faced captain, who had chronic dysentery and rarely smiled, now unbent, wrinkled his leathery cheeks into a grin, and ordered the boys to bring vintage wine from his private stock. Yarn followed yarn, laugh followed laugh.

"You know what Farel tells me?" Champdor announced. "That my name is literally the name given by the natives to Boure. Peculiar, eh? A good omen for me."

Farel began to wonder why the others did not resent Champdor's boisterous manner.

Then Champdor reached out his hand, laid it on Farel's shoulder, and smiled. His smile wiped out all trace of resentment in Farel. He smiled back, frankly.

"I'm glad that old Farel is the fellow to help me cut my teeth out here," Champdor stated. "He is serious and I'm an ass. One counterbalances the other."

"Not such a bad fellow, Champdor," thought Farel.

SIX weeks later, the two lieutenants arrived in a small village on the Niger bank.

Here, as everywhere, they were received cordially by the dignitaries and the population. Apparently the presence of white men in the Boure had lost the shock of novelty. Chickens, lambs, baskets of fruit were brought in plenty to the door of the spacious hut given them as residence by the elderly *loutiguy*, village chief. The usual swarm of children congregated and stared admiringly from a safe distance.

Champdor learned to accept this sometime annoying curiosity as a matter of course. The big fellow even enjoyed making a spectacle of himself for a juvenile audience, such as shaving, or brushing his teeth.

On this day, arriving early in the afternoon, Farel had said that he would employ the hours of daylight left him to clear up his notes, jotted down during the last few days. He was in high spirits. The mission was a success. His map would correct the slight errors made by the preceding expedition, and he had gathered definite information on conditions in the Boure.

Although the last treaty had taken Boure away from Samory, the chief's bands still made trips to the left bank of the Niger to collect tribute and recruit men for war service. An occurrence of recent date, properly handled by the French, would swing feeling away from the black leader: Samory had taken several women from a village for his already crowded harem in Bissandougou. No doubt feeling secure in his might, he had neglected to pay for them. The ethical value of the deed angered no one, but the financial loss had caused resentment.

Farel had promised the chief in each of the villages he had visited that the French would soon come into the Boure with *Tirailleurs* and cannon, and build a fort at Siguiri, where the best ford across the Niger was located.

Having established his work table in the shade of a convenient tamarind tree, he watched Champdor disappear, camera in hand.

Champdor had shown an artistic taste that Farel candidly admitted was lacking in himself. The new lieutenant's sketches of native types were not only amusing, but well executed for an amateur. Farel therefore trusted his second with the camera, hoping thereby to obtain not only valuable photographic documents but well composed pictures, a quality not to be scorned. Boyish in this as in other things, Champdor had gone whole heartedly into his task. On the journey from Kita to Niagassola across the red plateau, and from the latter town to the Niger, Champdor had often taken long excursions for the sake of a good plate.

And in this particular village Farel knew that Champdor could obtain interesting views. The picturesque cluster of round Malinke huts, with the slightly flattened cones of the roofs, the graceful trees, fig, tamarind and baobab, the broad expanse of the Niger visible across the partially flooded rice plantations, were worth recording.

For a time Farel worked intently. His pen traced curves and twists, busily shaded the *hachures* indicating altitudes.

Then, imperceptibly, a sound penetrated his consciousness, a droning, steady noise, floating to his ears from far off.

Tomtoms, he decided. Nothing strange in tomtoms. They regulated much of African life, taking the place of church bells and public criers' drums. Probably youths were being initiated into the man-clan in the forest, or even the news of his arrival was being transmitted to another town. One-two, one-two; he found himself absentmindedly counting the beats.

The rhythm assumed a familiar ring, evoked dim memories. One-two, one-two. The beat was too monotonous to be a message. It was a rallying call. He had heard the call before—a sharp stroke, space, two sharp strokes in quick succession.

From a certain mellow ring in the instrument, the fact that it resounded clearly although evidently at a great distance, Farel concluded that a very large instrument was in use. Bigger than the average village tomtom.

One-two, a quick beat, space and two more——

He should know the call. When the hordes of Samory had marched on Bamako, the days and nights were punctuated by the pulse of the tomtom.

"Fabou!" he told himself.

Fabou's tomtom, with its constant, unchanging, one-two rythm. A war tomtom—Fabou's signal, he could not mistake it. Fabou was on the right bank of the river, less than five miles away.

Not a pleasant neighbor, Fabou, but safe enough now, when Samory was at peace with the French. He, Fabou, was probably gathering his men for an expedition against some unruly village. Farel breathed more easily when he reached this conclusion.

An hour went by.

Then Makam Tiaba, who had been squatting on his heels some yards away, resting after the morning march, stood up, stretched, and came forward. He settled himself again, nearer, and looked at his chief expectantly. Tiaba evidently wished to talk, and had thus announced his intention. He usually avoided disturbing Farel when he worked.

"What dost thou want, Tiaba?" the officer questioned, without looking up.

"Thou dost hear nothing?" demanded the sergeant cautiously.

"The tomtom?"

"Yes. I don't like tomtoms."

Farel looked up. Tiaba was not easily perturbed, and if he did not like the tomtoms, he had a valid reason.

"Why?"

"Three tomtoms there. Each tomtom is tomtom of one *batiguy*—chief of one thousand men."

"I hear only one," Farel said. "Fabou's——"

"We blacks have ears for tomtoms. There is one near, two more far. The one thou dost hear is truly Fabou's. The next is Tekouba's. The last one N'Golo."

Fabou, Tekouba, N'Golo, three names known wherever Samory was known. The first was his brother, the second the leader of his riders, and the third, N'Golo, was a former sergeant of *Tirailleurs*, who had taken service with Samory after his discharge. In vain Farel tried to catch the sound of the two tomtoms he had not identified. But blacks have ears for tomtoms that no white man can equal.

"Makam Tiaba, dost thou think that the tomtoms threaten us?"

"Yes. Why should there be so many warriors across the river?"

"Samory is our friend," Farel objected.

"Samory is no man's friend. He made peace, but what can be done can be undone. Didst thou not hear that he had punished his own father for disobeying him? If Fabou, Malinkamory, Ibrahima, or any other of his sons and brothers disobeyed him, would he hesitate to kill him? See, thou hast come within short reach of him and he will attack."

"We'll see, Tiaba."

"I do not speak because I fear," Tiaba added, "but I believe you should know that the Somonos have been summoned with their canoes to Fabou's side of the stream."

"True?"

Tiaba wordlessly spat in the dust. He had spoken the truth and scorned to answer an implied doubt.

This last information meant much to Farel. The Somonos were the masters of the Niger. They never paid tribute to any one, and were left at peace by all to pursue their trade of fishing, on the sole condition that they ferry travelers across the river when required. They would take Fabou and his men to the left bank as cheerfully as they would have transported Farel. They accomplished their work, for the sake of retaining their immunity in time of war, regardless of the purpose of their employers.

Farel invited Tiaba's opinion—

"Will they come tonight?"

"No. There will not be enough canoes to take everybody across tonight. All day tomorrow they will cross. Fabou has learned perhaps that thou and the other lieutenant will stay here until tomorrow noon."

For a time Farel was silent. Then he ordered:

"Double the sentries tonight, Tiaba. Give out extra cartridges, one hundred to a man." As an afterthought he added, "Send a man to tell Lieutenant Champdor I must talk with him."

Tiaba left.

Champdor arrived almost immediately, and was soon informed of what had occurred.

"You'd better get some sleep this afternoon," Farel suggested. "You'll be leaving on the trail at eleven."

"What's the idea?" Champdor asked in surprize. "I understand there's danger, but what's the purpose of my leaving alone? It would be best for both of us to go. We could get a good lead by morning."

"There's a little matter of tact in question. We've announced to the chief that we would stay until tomorrow noon."

"Yes, but I don't see——"

"I have promised him protection, if he

comes out openly for us. And I have orders from Combeau to leave a good impression. If I leave in a hurry, at the mere sound of Fabou's tomtom— Do you see?"

"I admit it would look bad."

"Fabou will not be here until tomorrow, well into the day. By that time I will have left, at my own stated time. A little thing, of course, but it means a lot to these people, who are watching me closely."

He worked with his pencil for a few seconds, then went on:

"You'll take the bearers, all the impedimenta, and march five miles away. There you'll wait for me. In case I should be caught here, I don't want a lot of useless men with me. You take one section, I keep the other." He handed Champdor the paper he had just noted. "Here's a sketch of the vicinity. It's crude, but it gives the necessary indication. You're to wait here—" he marked the spot heavily—"until I join you."

Champdor glanced at the map doubtfully.

"Say, Farel, did it ever occur to you that if he lands here before noon, he may come straight up the trail and attack me, leaving you to finish off later?"

"Forty *Tirailleurs* are not to be despised. I'll join you if I hear firing. In any case, it is scarcely likely. Fabou will butt the nearest thing—me. He doesn't like me. We've met before. In fact, given his choice between my head and yours, he'd take mine. I've decided, Champdor: I stick here until noon."

Champdor, thrusting his thumbs in his belt, paced up and down rapidly, then halted bruskly before the table.

"Say, I think it's crazy, this petty matter of pride. Is it compatible with your responsibility as mission commander to jeopardize everything like this? My advice would be to go tonight, together, and gain Niagassola. We'd be better there behind walls with the garrison, than out here—and of more service."

Farel, surprized, looked intently at Champdor. The smile was gone and the rosy complexion with it. The lieutenant was quite pale. Farel could not refrain from asking:

"Are you sure, Champdor, that your question of utility to the nation is your chief concern? Or our—your—fate?"

"I, I don't know," Champdor replied weakly. "Am I to understand that you think—that you accuse me of——"

"I accuse you of nothing, old man," Farel declared steadily. "You leap at conclusions. I can see you're nervous, that's all. Don't fret. Fabou'll attack me first, and if you hold the place I've assigned, I'll be all right."

Champdor, obviously wishing to retrieve his unfortunate remark, grew bolder.

"Look here," he said warmly. "I'll obey your orders, I know my place—but I don't see why I shouldn't share the full risks, right here with you."

"The chief cause of confusion in a hasty retreat, is never the soldiers, but the bearers. You'll help me most by keeping them out of the way."

"I won't be sorry to see a little excitement," Champdor declared airily. "The trip was interesting from your view-point but that's not what we soldiers were intended for."

"There'll be plenty of excitement," assured Farel.

Champdor wheeled on one heel, with an attempt at his former exuberance, and went into the hut presumably to prepare his belongings. Farel stared after him quizzically, then shrugged.

"Champdor, my friend," he concluded. "You have shrunken a little. Let's hope you don't burst like a bubble."

ON THE other side of the Niger, Samory's men were gathering.

The huge tomtom, emblematic of high command, stood at the side of the trail, on a rise of ground dominating the surrounding fields. Squat, obese, formidable in spite of the primitive ornaments of brass and leather, the gaudily decorated sides vibrated with the blows of the black in charge, summoning the Faithful to haste.

The cohorts of Fabou overflowed the narrow road, spilled into the plantations. Yellow *boubous*, crossed by the scarlet scarf supporting the short saber, baggy trousers of blue fastened around the ankles, red, black or yellow caps drawn tightly on the woolly skulls, the warriors streamed by in an endless flow toward the river bank.

The murmur of voices, the shuffling of naked feet in the red dust, were dominated by sharp words of command, by the peculiar squeal of the war-horns. Many of the rifles were new, recently arrived from the coast. The pouches slung from each man's shoulder were crammed with cartridges. Never in the history of the Sudan had such an inspired, well-equipped army taken the field. Perhaps El Hadj Omar, the Tukuleur, at the height of his power when the negroes still believed in him and his voice fired men to self sacrifice, had brought together more men. But they had not been armed with breach-loading rifles. And these men of Fabou, of Tekouba, of N'Golo, were merely an advance guard. Samory was coming up from Bissandougou with twice as many.

Behind the pulsing tomtom, well out of reach of the choking dust, a picturesque group of riders had halted in the shade of the trees.

Astride a black horse, several feet away from the others, a man looked on the warriors, impassively. He wore a snowy-white *boubou*, gold embroidered, which draped over voluminous trousers of dark cloth and high, leather boots. Against the white cloth hanging from the turban, the face stood out, clear as an engraving. A fine-featured face, light-brown in color. High forehead, well-shaped nose, firm lips, a scant beard lengthening the chin. More than any of his followers, he revealed the strain of Berber blood.

Remaining motionless, a majestic figure, palm on the hilt of his saber, he seemed a materialization from the mystical tales of Sudanese tradition, another Diawara, wielding the magic sword of Mekka.

He was Fabou, brother of Samory.

Before the coming of the French, Fabou's name had been synonymous with victory. The *Tirailleurs*, led by their French officers, had changed this, had thrown him from the pedestal of glory. He had been defeated, by forces not one-tenth as strong as his own. Once, at Oueyako, he had thought himself victorious, only to be smashed by one of the deceptive moves familiar to the newcomers.

Fabou felt that his defeat had been due to inferior armament. What could he hope to do against rifles and field guns, with nothing save percussion rifles and trade muskets, but little less dangerous to the men who handled them than to the enemy? Some said, even within his hearing, that the fault was his, that he could not cope with the French because they were better warriors. Much depended on his showing in the attack on the morrow. If he failed Samory would probably remove him from high command.

But Fabou was confident that he would not fail, that he would initiate the next campaign with a success, throw, as a defiance, the heads of two Frenchmen into Combeau's teeth.

He had a vision of a triumphant march to Kita, then to Kayes. Negores who had accepted French rule through force of circumstance would arise and follow him. He smiled. Perhaps within him lurked the ambition to take Samory's place. If he won over the dreaded invaders, no dream was too great.

He turned in the saddle, called N'Golo, the former *Tirailleur*, a great black, whose *boubou* was decorated with amulets.

"Who leads the *Tirailleurs* camped across the *Dialiba?*"

"A chief with two braids, whom thou dost know—Far-Eli."

"Spies inform me there is another white man with him. Who is he?"

"No one knows. He was not with the French when I fought with them. He must be newly come from the islands."

It was the general belief in the Sudan that the French inhabited a group of islands off the north coast of Africa. They were also thought to be few in number, and their reason for African invasion to obtain blacks to work for them.

"I know Far-Eli," Fabou admitted musingly. "I have seen him. I am glad it is he whose head will fall."

N'Golo's teeth flashed in the crimson mouth.

"He has not fallen yet, Fabou, my Master! Far-Eli is a good warrior. So is Makam Tiaba, whom I also know. And, being white, the other chief with two braids must be brave."

Fabou's lips twitched. Evidently N'Golo did not please him with his too ready grin.

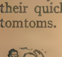
"Tekouba!" he called.

Tekouba detached himself from the group, and drawing near waited respectfully. A sort of giant, with ebony skin and coarse face.

"I have chosen thee to attack first in the morning," Fabou informed him. "Pick good followers."

"It will be done, Master."

Fabou waved both men back, and resumed his contemplation. The dust rose higher. From the south, more warriors were coming. They filled the road as far as the eye could see in every direction, and their quick pattering was cadenced by the tomtoms.



THAT night, the chief of the village invited the white men to attend a dance, given by the youthful element, in the central place. Champdor, who was to leave quietly at eleven, was requested by Farel to attend, and not to give signs of impatience, or reveal in any manner his intended departure. It was an absolute certainty that among the inhabitants several spies watched their every move. And Farel intended Champdor's maneuver to remain secret.

Farel and his second sat on the veranda of the chief's hut, a rudimentary veranda formed by the projection of the roof. As in the average Malinke village, an enormous cotton tree grew in the center of the open place. Huge fires had been lighted. Although never quite a fire worshipper, the African loves light. Due to the quality of the wood used, the flames assumed a greenish hue at the root, swelled redly, and ended in a marvelous flowering of golden tongues, twisting against the darkness with beautiful, unforeseen designs.

What might be termed the orchestra was installed on the edge of the illuminated circle. And to Farel, whose ears from long acquaintance, were attuned to primitive music, the medley did not sound unpleasant. Champdor, after listening, admitted his surprize.

"It has a weird charm," he declared. "Sounds like nothing I have ever heard, should grate on my nerves, and yet doesn't. I don't even find it ridiculous."

There were, of course, tomtoms. There were two *balas*, zilophones from which the musicians coaxed deep mellow notes that rippled and cascaded with haunting melody. The native guitar, the *cora*, was represented. The Malinke flute, the Foula clarinet, piped shrill notes. It was not a confused medley, but a well-ordered performance, with every instrument filling in its appointed part.

At times, the tomtoms would dwindle to a faint drone, and the clear note of the flute lifted and voiced the soul of the village-loving black. Farel, half closing his eyes, could recall the pastures in the hills, where the stolid Pheul leads his herds to graze and betrays his loneliness with the sound of the flute, as have pastoral tribes in other lands.

The theme shifted, and the Bambara horn, made of an elephant tusk, would glint in the ruddy light, and warlike squeals would ring, echo, while the young men greeted the call with loud shouts. Sole means of expression of a poetic race, this barbarous music held all the characteristics that make up the black: The depression, the sudden hilarity, the drowsy moments, the fierce rise of fighting lust.

The married women, in a circle, clapped their hands, and the girls danced, according to their interpretation, grotesquely or gracefully.

Champdor, preoccupied, laid his hand on Farel's shoulder.

"Do they know what will happen tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Their village may suffer."

"All the more reason why they should enjoy themselves tonight." Farel paused. Then, from his store of recollection, dug up a tale for Champdor's distraction. He felt that the lieutenant was not happy, was more than a little lonely, and more than half frightened. "I have seen men captured the night before, and women, too, dancing and singing in the fire light. They did not know where they were being taken, what their fate would be. All day long they had carried tremendous burdens, had seen their friends and relatives knifed for lagging. Yet the tomtom brought them on their feet."

"Where was that?"

"Not far from Kita, during the last campaign. I led a reconnoitering party at night, and watched the scene from the bushes. And I wondered if these people would ever understand us, whether we were really their superiors——"

"It is not a proof of intelligence to laugh when in trouble," grumbled Champdor, "or at the prospect of death."

"I'm not claiming that it is intelligent," mildly corrected Farel. "But if the religions that we white men believe in are not created to bring us to a cheerful acceptance of trouble and death, then I am mad. These negroes have succeeded, we have not. Queer thing, Champdor, how extremes meet: The most learned philosophers are those who can take their own demise as calmly as that of any other man. All teachings resolve, ultimately, in preparation for death after scorning the worries of life. Philosophers and Malinke negroes react alike."

Champdor, nervously, lighted a cigaret. Farel watched his face in the brief instant the glow lasted. Still good looking was Champdor, but singularly drawn of feature.

Champdor picked up the conversation.

"I for one can not see the idea of throwing away my skin light heartedly. A man is made to live."

"You've chosen the wrong profession," Farel remarked.

"Possibly."

Farel broke the conversation by turning to the chief and talking to him in dialect. A calabash shell, filled with a frothy liquid, was passed from hand to hand in the group of elders. A special container had been handed to the two white men. Farel drank, and passed it on to Champdor.

"Not bad. In fact quite strong," the big man commented.

"*Dolo*, millet beer," Farel classified. "Another cause why the natives will be glad to see Samory go." Then, as Champdor regarded him questioningly, "Originally Samory was a fetishist. When he rose to power he accepted Islam, for the same reason that Henry IV became converted in our own county—policy. And, being converted, he declared all his subjects Moslems as well as himself. According to the Koran, *dolo* is forbidden in his dominions. The fetishist, being used to *dolo*, did not accept the edict with good grace. So, *dolo* was made in secret, and absorbed in secret, even during Samory's reign here. Now that he is gone, and we do not object, they are making up for lost time. *Dolo* is harmless but creates the taste. I tremble to think what will occur when the sulfuric trade gin comes into this land in quantities."

Champdor lifted the container to his lips and took a long draught.

"Thou wilt see good dancing soon," the chief promised Farel.

The central place had been cleared, and was revealed bare in the firelight. From the opposite end of the village a procession appeared, composed of very young girls, from seven years to ten. Their supple bodies, dark brown, glinted like so many bronze statues. They filed gravely with short shuffling steps, formed graceful figures, the line dividing, crossing and recrossing in an intricate pattern.

Farel had heard of the dancing girls of Boure, and was delighted, enthusiastic. Forgetful of the fact that the next day would be filled with trouble, he applauded, clapped his hands, to the delight of the old leader who was immensely happy that something in his humble village had touched the white visitor.

Even Champdor was interested. Strangely, the fact that he could not speak the native tongue seemed to make him a favorite with the chief, who attempted often to draw him into conversation in broken French, and laughed at the lieutenant's attempt to pronounce Malinke words.

"*Joli, joli!*" he declared, slapping himself on naked thighs. "Pretty, pretty!"

The dance ended. The chief called one of the girls to him. There was a great deal of excited comment among the elders, and finally the *loutiguy* addressed the child. For a moment, it was uncertain whether the dancer would cry or laugh. Optimism conquered and she grinned joyously, then knelt before the bewildered Champdor.

"What the——"

"The chief gives her to you as a present," explained Farel, with a smile. "Don't refuse. He'd be offended."

Champdor scratched his head in deep embarrassment.

"What will I do with her?"

"The authorities will take her off your hands. There is an orphanage at Saint Louis on the coast, where the Sisters are always happy to take in interesting or uninteresting pupils."

Champdor rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I have money enough to take care of her. I'll trust her to some negro family in Kayes instead. She wouldn't be happy uprooted."

"She'll soon be off your hands in any case. At thirteen or fourteen, she'll marry."

"What's her name?" Champdor inquired.

"Kalogue," said the chief.

"White Moon, or Moonlight, if you prefer," translated Farel.

Presently he glanced at his watch.

"Ten o'clock," he announced, in quick French. "We better make a pretense at sleep."

And so the Frenchmen arose and took leave of their hosts.

"What am I to do with the kid?" wondered Champdor.

"Take her with you, if you want." Farel turned to the child and conversed at some length. "She says she must visit her family until morning. I'll bring her tomorrow."

"Good."

They gained the hut and sat in darkness, waiting for the appointed time.

In the meantime, Farel went on to explain:

"The place where you'll stop is a sort of gorge through which the trail runs. You could hold out there any length of time with the number of men at your disposal. That's one of the reasons I am sending you there. Whoever holds that spot, holds the trail to Niagassola. Naturally, you're a trifle worried—a man always is before his first engagement. But I trust there will be no trouble."

"How will I find the spot at night?"

"Makam Tiaba knows the way. He was down here before, with the mission that signed the treaty with Samory."

"Makam Tiaba will be with me?" Champdor asked in a relieved tone.

"It's time," Farel announced soberly.

They went out, found the bearers and *Tirailleurs* asleep, save the sentries, kept alert by the alert sergeant. They had been kept in ignorance of Farel's intent, but those who were to follow Champdor got up without grumbling. In a low voice Farel made the last recommendations to Makam Tiaba. He wished that it were compatible with his position as a white man to give the Bambara precise knowledge of what was to be done. But that would have been an unnecessary slight of Champdor.

So, Farel kept to matters of detail such as were within Makam Tiaba's duties as a non-com. and trusted to Fate that Champdor would execute the more important items of the plan.

Down the gentle declivity leading to the village place, the fires still burned high, the orchestra played, and shadowy forms leaped and twisted. A *Tirailleur* brought Champdor's horse, and the lieutenant mounted. Quietly Tiaba took the lead, and the detachment slowly moved off, *Tirailleurs* and bearers silent according to instructions.

For more than a mile, Farel accompanied his second. He longed for a more experienced man to trust, and inwardly cursed the devious ways of fathers in search of promotion for their sons. At last he halted, offered his hand.

"Tomorrow, at two——"

"Tomorrow at two," Champdor repeated.

"Good luck," Farel added.

"Same to you, and *bon courage!*" replied Champdor.

Farel stood still, and stared after him in the darkness. The darker bulk of the small troop faded gradually, disappeared. It was as if they had vanished toward the dim stars.

Good courage, Champdor had advised. Yes, agreed Farel, good courage was needed. He, himself, had always found sufficient reserve to meet situations. Good courage, if Champdor had it tomorrow, might mean a successful day.

THE sun was turning the morning mist over the Niger to light shreds of pink vapor when Farel arose.

Absolute peace reigned over the village. The tomtoms that had throbbed at intervals the day before were silent now. Yet a sense of impending events hung over the countryside. With satisfaction, Farel noticed that the village was emptied of women and children, also that the majority of the men had left. The others were even now filing out in procession, unhurried, as men who know the amount of time left them to accomplish what they wish.

The chief, pipe between his teeth, approached Farel.

"We are going away. The rifles will soon be speaking around here."

"Yes—after I leave it is best that Fabou's men find the village emptied. Otherwise they would say that thou didst fight on my side, and pillage and kill in reprisal. Dost know if Fabou has crossed the stream?"

The old man glanced to right and left, as if he feared a possible listener, who might report to Samory that he had given information. Seeing no one, save the white man and the *Tirailleurs* he replied frankly enough.

"He has crossed." He stretched out his long hand with the knotted fingers and wrinkled gray-black skin. "He is there, where the river curves."

"How many men with him?"

"As many as leaves in the trees, men say who have seen them. They speak, as is their way, rashly. But a good number, anyway."

"Thank thee, chief. I may perhaps harm some of the huts facing the enemy. It will be necessary for defense. I will try to spare thy village as much as possible. And will go at noon."

"Why should I protest for huts when thou art risking thy body?" reassured the chief. "I hope all goes well with thee—farewell."

"Farewell!"

In fifteen minutes the last inhabitant had departed. Farel immediately set to work, loopholing the huts that faced in the direction of Fabou's warriors. With three of the most intelligent soldiers, corporals, he paced the plain which the attackers would be compelled to cross, estimated the distance from tree to tree, and gave instructions as to the manipulation of back sights.

"Aim always at the knees," he advised. "At long range men usually shoot too high."

Then he mounted his horse and, alone, left the village for the main trail which led north to Champdor's position. He wished to see for himself every incident of the ground, every twist in the path.

Pride was not his only motive for awaiting Fabou. He was not being rash. He had sufficient experience to know exactly what he was doing. His detachment of picked men could be depended upon to excel Fabou's warriors in marching and fighting, burdened as was the native leader's column with inevitable weaklings. It is a well-known military axiom that the pace of a unit is that of its slowest man. There were no slothful marchers among the *Tirailleurs*.

His apparently overbold inaction of the night and morning had a purpose. Military reports are based on facts, not on presumption. Morally, Farel was certain that Fabou was hostile and would attack. Actually he was supposed to believe that Samory was carrying out the treaty he had signed. The first shot would have to be fired before he could inform Combeau in Kayes that hostilities had broken out.

In turn, Combeau could inform the Government. Of late the Chamber of Deputies in Paris had been loath to vote credits for the Sudan. The more spectacular expeditions in Indo-China held public attention. The African conquest was reported to be a waste of life and money, a mad dream. National pride would force the hand of the law-makers. If a French unit was attacked, the credits would be voted. Moreover Farel wished to estimate the strength of Fabou's forces and the ability of the warriors, so that he would be able to state with authority whether the new rifles made a difference in the efficiency of Samory's men. These details, ascertained now, would save many lives. The greatest loss in colonial warfare is felt during that uncertain period when a European army is testing the worth of its opponents, learning the more familiar tactics, the reaction under given circumstance. Once a white commander has learned these details he should be able to reduce his losses to a minimum.

When the French campaigned in Indo-China, the white officers with the advance guard were invariably shot down from ambush. Their men, in trying to save the bodies from mutilation, suffered great losses. It was several months before the order was given that the advance guards should be exclusively native troopers. The result was immediate. The loss of white officers fell to a fourth of what it had formerly been. In the Sudan the problems were different, but equally possible of solution. And today, Farel would know what new methods Samory had learned.

At thirty minutes past ten, the lieutenant saw the first yellow *boubous* strung out between the trees. Through field glasses he rapidly noticed an improvement in marching order, probably the effect of N'golo's teaching. More *boubous* issued from the shelter of the trees, until they formed a living barrier, their left flank resting on the river bank, their right on the road.

Farel lifted a whistle to his lips and blew a signal. The *Tirailleurs* entered the huts, and took their posts at the loopholes.

In front of them the warriors had halted. It was now nearly eleven o'clock.

Riders in white rode up and down their front, gesturing. Then a group detached itself and came forward several yards, knelt. Grayish puffs of smoke edged the muzzles of their rifles, disappeared. The bullets went too high to be heard. Farel scribbled in his notebook, after a last glance at his watch.

Eleven-Two. Fabou opens fire.

"Eh, thou," he addressed the nearest corporal.

"Lieutenant?"

"When the men over there pass that tree—" he indicated the spot—"the men will fix rifles—so."

He picked up the corporal's piece and adjusted the sights. The corporal went from man to man. Then he returned and saluted:

"All ready."

Farel lighted a cigaret, and cheek resting on palm, contemplated the enemy. They were obviously astonished by the complete silence from the village. But they gradually neared the danger zone. At last the first warrior passed the imaginary line. The corporal grunted an order. The sharp detonations of the Gras rifles crackled from hut to hut. No visible damage was done.

"More care," urged Farel. "Is there any hurry, thick-heads?"

He took the rifle from the nearest man, rested it on the wall, aimed with exaggerated deliberation.

"See that *tantiguy*—chief of ten, equivalent to a corporal—over there?"

"Yes, lieutenant."

"Tell the men to stop firing until I have shot him," Farel ordered.

The *tantiguy* was mounted and some yards in the lead of his squad. Farel lined his sights with the rider's knee, pressed the trigger. For a second he doubted his success, then the fellow brought both his hands to his midrift, bent over the neck of his horse, and fell into the outstretched arms of his men. Farel returned the rifle to the owner.

"See, it's easy when care is used."

IN SPITE of this assurance, the aim of the *Tirailleurs* did not improve until a more reasonable range was attained. Then, the hail of lead took effect, and huddled warriors dotted the path of the advance. N'golo had attained one result, protection of an attacking party by supporting fire. But against the thick walls of clay, field artillery would have been needed. By mere accident a few bullets entered the loop-holes, whined through the huts, and struck dully against the farther wall.

Stepping to the safe side of the hut Farel looked out at the shadows—it lacked but a few minutes of twelve now. The patient move forward of Fabou's men had taken the best part of an hour. They were now under cover of strangling bushes, and obviously waiting word for the final rush. Across the field from their starting point a single horseman galloped, superbly careless of the bullets.

"Tekouba," some one announced.

A little thrill, half expectation, half fear, could be felt among the *Tirailleurs*. Tekouba, although involved in Fabou's defeat, still inspired respect. His courage was undoubted, the fury of his attack a byword. Probably Fabou had held him back until the crucial moment, so that he would not fall before he could be of use.

Farel again placed the whistle against his teeth, blew four blasts. And with the lieutenant in the lead, the *Tirailleurs* filed out into the back street, passed into the trail. Farel, not wishing his departure to be known, and not wishing to offer himself as a target above the bushes, walked, while his orderly led his horse behind him.

The firing ceased. Tekouba, he reasoned, thought the *Tirailleurs* were reserving their fire to blast the first wave of attackers. He hurried, and he could hear the panting of the soldiers behind him. They understood his move and grunted approval. By the time they were discovered only a few of Samory's men would be in a position to attack them, and they could outstrip the others.

A storm of cheers before the village announced that Tekouba's onslaught was under way. The pounding of rifle butts on walls and doors, the screams of encouragement from the leaders, the discharge of firearms breaking out afresh, made him smile. It would be several minutes before the brave Samorians realized that the huts were empty. In spite of their number, they would proceed with caution, awed by the thought of half a hundred soldiers waiting for them, bayonets ready.

The Frenchman and his followers had reached the main trail before the sound of the shouts changed from fighting lust to disappointed rage. His trick being discovered, there existed no further need of concealment. He gained the saddle and urged his mount forward at a canter. The *Tirailleurs* trotted after him.

So far, all had gone well and there was little cause to worry. He would be able to join Champdor before the pursuers caught up and, finding his strength doubled, Fabou would hesitate, giving him time to take the Niagassola trail. The cavalry of the native leader could not use any path save the beaten road, for the soil was bushy and rocky. At Niagassola his responsibility ended, he automatically fell under the orders of the fort commander, a captain. Moreover, he had not lost a man.

And the information he desired, was obtained. Samory meant war.

Aware that some one trotted swiftly along close to his right stirrup, he glanced down. The scantily clad girl dancer, Kalogue, was keeping pace with him, a bundle on her head! In truth it must be said that she was not over-pleased with the method of traveling adopted by her master's comrade, and was on the verge of tears and exhaustion.

In the excitement of the morning he had forgotten her, after his first natural conclusion that she would ignore her change in masters, and flee to the woods with her mother.

"Where hast thou been, Kalogue?" he asked.

"When the poum-poum started, I hid. I saw thee leave—and came. Where is the big white man?" she panted.

"We are going to him now."

"It is good."

Farel was annoyed by this added responsibility. Reasoning calmly, she was worth less than a *Tirailleur*. He was about to lift her to the saddle when——

"Lieutenant!" The corporal bringing up the rear called out.

"What?"

"Samory men."

Farel heard the ringing hoofs of a mounted troop not far behind, approaching swiftly. He had seen no horsemen on the field as a unit and was bewildered by Fabou's prompt pursuit. He gave the necessary order and the *Tirailleurs* about-faced. Around a bend in the road, a hundred and fifty yards away, appeared more than a score of riders. They did not belong to the cavalry, but were the various chiefs of units engaged against him in the storming of the village.

Tekouba, saber in fist, was conspicuous.

At the first shots, half the assailants tumbled. The breach locks slid, rasped shut again, and more saddles were emptied.

Outnumbered, fearful of the bayonets, the horsemen slackened their rush. The *Tirailleurs* ran swiftly down the road, bayoneting the wounded where they lay, with a quick side dart of the long blades. Alone, Tekouba, again miraculously unscathed, kept on, having eyes only for the white man whose head he had promised to Fabou.

Farel, who had reined his horse across the path, drew his revolver, and broke the negro's arm with the first shot. The *Tirailleurs*, recovering from their first excitement, clusterd about Tekouba, dragging at his legs, and brought him to the ground with an impact that shook the giant frame, and almost caused him to lose consciousness. Several bayonets entered his chest at the same time and between his teeth blood gushed.

The blades came out red, and were poised for other blows. Tekouba, eyes wide open kept his gaze on the red steel needles.

"*Farha na!*" Farel called. "Don't kill!"

A half dozen startled faces lifted toward his. Farel himself could not understand why he had cried out. Probably a remnant of his early code, which reproved the killing in cold blood of a brave, helpless foe. Then Farel realized that with six or seven wounds letting his blood out Tekouba would soon die. But the lieutenant did not wish to change his orders once spoken.

Tekouba looked up. His lips twisted with pain, but his eyes were clear.

"Good," he accepted. And, seeing the *Tirailleurs* about to leave, asked a last favor, "Tell thy men to place me to die in the shade, and Allah grant thee a like finish."

Upon Farel's gesture acquiescence, two privates lifted him, and placed him in the shadow of two bushes by the trail. He was soon lost to sight.

On either side of the trail rock masses rose higher. Farel was getting near the appointed meeting place. Another few minutes and with all his men, he would be on the cleared road to Niagassola.

"Sound colors," Farel ordered to the bugler.

The stirring call strung out its notes. Then from ahead came the answer, the same call.

"He's there," Farel told himself. Then as an afterthought, "What a foolish thing a hunch is."

He resumed the march.

When he could see the clump of trees marking the exact emplacement assigned to Champdor, he urged his horse, went ahead of his men, eager to tell his second of his successful "coup."

A rifle coughed, a long vibration warned him that the missile had come very near.

"Champdor! What the ——! Tell your ——"

A volley answered him. Behind, he heard grunts, stifled cries. Several of the *Tirailleurs* were hit, two of them killed outright. What was the matter with Champdor? To add to his agitation a bugle, the same that had picked up his first signal, sounded "Open fire." It *must* be Champdor. Samory did not have bugles.

"Cease fire!" he cried. "Cease fire!" He whirled in the saddle. "Bugler—cease fire!"

But the bugler was dead, sprawled in the trail. The hail of bullets continued. More than half his men were down. The rest, having no orders were undecided and frightened.

"Back—back out of it!" Farel shouted.

What was left of his section retraced their steps down the trail, out of range, behind bushes.

Farel's mouth felt dry, his hands shook. This was ghastly. And that infernal bugle was ringing again, halting the fusillade. What could have happened in Champdor's mind to make him act without ascertaining upon whom he was firing? Had he gone mad with responsibility and fear?

He fastened a handkerchief to the scabbard of his sword, and was about to go forward again when one of the *Tirailleurs* touched his knee.

"Don't go. Lieutenant's not there. N'Golo!"

Farel recalled rumors that had been current in Kayes. N'Golo had organized his troops like French infantry, gave his commands in French. Why not the identical bugle calls? But if N'Golo was holding the trail, where was Champdor? It was unlikely that he had surrendered. And had he been attacked the sound of firing would have warned Farel.

Where was Champdor?

THE *Tirailleur* addressed him again—

"Fabou will come up from behind——"

Yes, something had to be done quickly. In a short time the head of Fabou's column would come up the trail and he would be caught between two fires. He looked about for a lane of escape, saw only the steep walls of the rocks. A sudden desperate hope sent him in search of the native child, whom he had last seen keeping pace with the *Tirailleurs*. She had abandoned her bundle and was hiding by the side of the trail.

"Dost thou know a trail up the hills, not far off?"

"Yes, I came to cut wood with the women, often," the child replied breathlessly.

"Show us the way."

Abandoning his horse and the badly wounded members of his troop, he followed the girl. What a strange twist! Everything seemed prearranged to make this child be of service. If he had allowed Champdor to refuse the chief's gift, or if Champdor had taken her with him ——

Kalogue knew the vicinity of her native village. Following her, Farel gained the top of the nearest cliffs, cut across thick shrubs, over small plateau, in ravines, followed brooks and almost obliterated trails. She was an able guide, the key to their vast prison of bush and streams. The *Tirailleurs* took turns in carrying her.

Fabou's men had picked up their tracks. The bootsoles of the white officer were unmistakable to the practiced eyes of the many professional trail-followers in Samory's legions. Soon, the yellow *boubous* materialized. In spite of their efforts the followers of Fabou had failed to surround Farel. They would form a circle close in, and find their prey gone. It was much like trying to catch fish by hand in a pool of murky water. And Kalogue knew the trails, every nook and corner of the plateau.

"Seventeen from forty-one, leave twenty-four," Farel muttered. "Seventeen from forty-one, leave twenty-four ——"

At twelve minutes before two o'clock that afternoon he had had forty-one *Tirailleurs*. Now, at a quarter of six, less than four hours later, he could only count seventeen. Of these, several showed bandaged arms or legs, or untended cuts about the face. On the trail, when N'golo's men had fired, he had left fifteen or sixteen men. Therefore eight had fallen since. If the wild nature of the land prevented the weight of numbers to tell, it also annulled the superior organization and skill of the troop led by the white man. In the short range fusillades, a *Tirailleur* was no better than a warrior. Yes he might lose more men before nightfall.

The *Tirailleurs* had their reserve ration of food, so that hunger was not felt. Bu the water soon gave out. Negroes are great water drinkers. It is not unusual for a thirsty bearer to drain a bucket containing the allotment for a horse. This need of fluid may be the result of excessive loss of moisture through perspiration. Once the canteens were dry the brooks were resorted to. In taking care of the wounded, however, Farel had unadvisedly used too much water. And the streams were being watched now.

The lieutenant was tempted to order his men to don the *boubous* found on the dead, and to mingle with the pursuers, leaving him to take his chance alone. But he knew what the answer would be. They might join Samory after their time of service with the French expired, but they would never leave a white man for whom they felt responsible.

Although he had exposed himself as much as his men, he was unwounded. His greater nervous reserve was telling. The spirit of a white man will often tire out the sheer muscular vigor of the blacks.

"Where do we go now, Kalogue?" he asked.

The child counted on her fingers:

"One trail is closed, two trails—" After a moment she decided. "Follow, Master."

"We must hurry, Kalogue, night is coming."

"I hasten."

She led the way through the bushes, stopping occasionally to ponder. After half an hour, she halted, and pointed at a clump of shrubs bearing great red flowers.

"We go under that."

Farel did not understand her reason. But his life was in the tiny black hands of the dancer and he nodded. The girl crawled under the branches. Farel followed her, for twenty-five feet he followed the pink soles in the semidarkness. Insects, disturbed, skimmed across his fingers. Once he heard the unmistakable rustling of a large snake. Then, abruptly, Kalogue's legs vanished from beneath her body. Slowly she lowered herself into some sort of a cavity. It was not a hole, properly speaking, but a deep cut in the soil, altogether sheltered by bushes meeting overhead.

"When the rains are heavy, water flows here," Kalogue informed him. "It is like this for a long way, then sinks underground."

She waited until the last *Tirailleur* had joined them, then proceeded swiftly toward the north, Farel believed.

"Surely thou didst not come here to cut wood!" he declared.

"No. My father, when he lived, was hunter for the village. He found this place following a leopard."

"Thy father did not take thee hunting, did he?"

"No. But many moons ago, when the village failed to pay tribute, Samory's riders came. And my father took me here, I, my brothers, my sisters, and our mothers."

It was not strange then that Kalogue took the adventure calmly. This was not her first hurried flight.

Abruptly, the big ditch ended against a wall of rock. A hole opening beneath the cliff, yawned, a black funnel pitting the ground for many feet, a hidden water source.

"What do we do now?" he asked.

She lifted a stumpy little finger, black satin on one side, cream on the other.

"Up!"

"Can it be done?" he asked in amazement.

There was still sufficient daylight to discern the flank of the cliff, hard of ascension, but not impossible. There are few things impossible to a man whose life is in danger.

Here, however, another problem confronted him. He must abandon two of the *Tirailleurs*, wounded too badly to negotiate the feat. He recommended that they retrace their steps, search for bodies, take a yellow blouse and black bonnet and pretend to be members of the searching parties. The lax inner organization of Fabou's bands promised almost certain success. They could join him in Niagassola when opportunity offered. Meanwhile he would make it known to French authorities that they were not deserters.

Farel started up first. Agile as a monkey Kalogue came immediately behind. The lieutenant recalled his vacations in the mountains of Eastern France. What he had learned there was useful now. Bad moments followed, when he was forced to test one hold after another before daring to trust his weight. Many times he was compelled to halt, clinging to the sharp edges of the rock, to advise his men. The *Tirailleurs* were heavier than he, and the support which had served him might give way under repeated strain. Cascades of dirt and dirt showered toward the hole below.

Three feet to climb, two—one, the top of the cliff overhung, and Farel searched for a solid place to execute the move that would hoist him the final distance.

Immediately above his head, a black face appeared, two yellow-clad shoulders beneath.

Farel could neither reach the revolver in the holster of his belt, move up, down, or to either side. He was trapped. With one move the warrior could precipitate him into space. But Farel was not a pessimist. He realized that the first normal impulse in man is to help another in distress. He must not allow the warrior to recover from his surprize. In any event, it was his only chance.

"*Ta!*" he urged, holding up his right hand. "Grasp!"

The negro obeyed. Powerful fingers closed upon the white man's. Farel confidently trusted himself to the immense strength of his helper. In another instant he stood beside the sentry.

Once safe, his enforced faith in humanity deserted him, as faith sometimes does when the need for it is past. Without releasing the hand that had so fortunately descended to save him, he drew his revolver, pressed it against the black's side. A quick glance had assured him that the warrior was alone.

Then he relaxed his grip on the sentry's hand and stepped back.

"Help the others," he ordered.

Kalogue was hoisted to firm ground, and one after another the fifteen *Tirailleurs*.

"Who is thy chief?" Farel asked.

The native did not have faith in human nature, did not believe in gratitude. Before the threatening muzzle he docilely told all he knew.

"N'Golo."

"Many warriors close by?"

"No one but me. I was sent up by N'Golo, who said I could see thee down below and point thee out to the others."

"Where is N'Golo now?"

The man did not know.

"Did he kill the other white man?"

The warrior again shook his head. Badly frightened as he was Farel felt that he spoke the truth. For a moment Farel was inclined to tie him securely, thinking that his comrades would find him. But a bound man in the open at night, is in danger of never seeing the sun.

"*Marabout?*" Farel asked, touching the warrior's amulets.

"Yes," agreed the sentry, he was a Moslem.

Farel gathered several amulets from his men, which he added to those of the warrior, forming a little heap on the ground.

"I will allow thee to live," he promised, "but swear to keep secret our way of escape."

"It would be unwise for me to speak," replied the negro. "For it was my hand that allowed you to go."

He swore all that was asked of him, by multiple awesome formulas. Farel, his natural optimism returning, found time to notice the similitude between this oath, and the oath sworn by knights in the middle ages.

"I am called Far-Eli," the white man concluded. "Seek me when peace comes again. I will reward thee then. These men will say that I speak the truth, that my tongue and my heart talk alike."

"It is so," several voices assured him.

The warrior touched Farel's sleeve, then his own forehead. Looking back, Farel could dimly perceive him, standing bewildered, still shaken by the extraordinary events.

"Where is the trail, Kalogue?"

"I don't know. I have never been so far from the village."

Farel glanced at the stars and set out.

For many hours he kept to his course instinctively. Against the sky he could see the reflection of N'Golo's fires, knew when he passed the farthest outposts, for negroes never fail to signal their presence by flames.

At last he knew he was clear. He did not reason, men like Farel often know without reason. They walk through danger as a blind man walks through night.

"I BEG your pardon, Lieutenant Champdor, for disturbing you," Farel remarked a few hours later.

Champdor, who had just concluded a cold meal, who had evidently eaten heartily, was holding a lighted cigaret in one hand and a metal cup filled with wine in the other.

Having passed quietly through the outposts facing Fabou's bands, Farel had signaled the sentries to remain quiet, and had reached the chief of the detachment without being noticed. For a moment he stood still, watching the irritatingly innocent face, the chiseled profile, the lilac-blue eyes. No man with a tortured conscience would have honored the tinned meat product of the American contractor with such a splendid appetite.

Champdor looked up, stared incredulously, then, smiling, arose, hand extended:

"Old Farel! Do you know, I'm glad to see you!"

Farel accepted the hand-shake.

"You seem comfortable, Champdor," he said. "Evidently had an easier time than I did."

"Probably," agreed Champdor, with superb calm.

He offered no explanation. Yet Farel felt that explanation was due him. The extraordinary unconcern of the officer swept him from his well-planned interrogation, which would have coaxed the truth gently.

"Why the —— weren't you at the pass?" he demanded, straining to keep his voice down, for the troopers were casually sprawling about.

"I left at two-fifteen. Naturally, when you didn't show up, I thought you'd been caught in the village. The firing ceased, you know."

"You lie. I was there before two, and you had already gone. I found a bunch of blacks who shot down half my men."

Champdor, without appearing to be offended by the epithet, sympathized.

"Thunder! That's too bad."

Farel wondered who was mad, himself or Champdor. Certainly, in his opinion, the discussion called for more interest than the officer was showing.

He grasped his arm, shook him, and almost shouted in his face.

"Too bad! Too bad! Do you understand what you did?"

"Perfectly. Honestly, Farel, I believed it to be after two—" He made a gesture toward his fob pocket—"let's compare watches——"

"Idiot!"

Champdor drew himself up with ridiculous dignity.

"Lieutenant Farel, you are insulting me!"

"I am," Farel admitted. "I am—you——"

The pent-up resentment swelled to his lips in searing words. All barriers of politeness, all so-called gentlemanly behavior was wiped away by the immense anger that flamed in him.

Champdor listened patiently. He was still dignified, and did not seem angry.

"You're overtired, Farel," he suggested. "You better rest, then talk. I will not brawl with you. I admit I may have been too hasty in my withdrawl, but my responsibility as detachment commander made it imperative."

"I have a letter from Combeau placing you under my orders. I gave you the order to stay at the pass until I came. I named two o'clock as an approximate time. You had no order to leave, even though I failed to come on time. Remember that."

"Possibly, Farel, I should have taken your suggestions——"

"In the army one does not take suggestions, one obeys orders. There are twenty-six lives laid against you, Champdor. You may sing a different tune before a court martial."

"A court martial—" Champdor paled.

"Abandoned your post, didn't you? And from the firing, you knew you were before the enemy."

Champdor sank back into the folding chair he had occupied when Farel arrived.

Farel, his first anger passing, lowered his voice—

"Whatever made you do it, Champdor?"

"I didn't know. I didn't want to stay there and risk—what I thought had happened to you."

"Didn't you find it hard to leave a companion, I might even say a friend, up against it?"

Champdor shrugged wearily.

"Tell me exactly what time you left?"

"I might as well. Twelve o'clock. I—I thought—" he floundered helplessly.

"You had made up your mind that I was crazy, and would be killed. Is that it?"

"Well——"

Farel dug his hands in his pockets, strode up and down in agitation. He stopped, looking dumbly at Champdor. The big fellow's total collapse appalled him. He had never before seen a man go to pieces so completely. Cowardice? That must be it.

"I don't know what to make of you, Champdor," he said. "You don't behave like a reasonable being, giving way to the first impulse, blissfully unconscious of the harm you've done."

Champdor seemed near tears. Farel laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm not even angry with you. You're a kid," he declared. "Try to tell me what happened. I have to account for the men I've lost, and I'd like to make it as easy for you as I can. You can go home—after everything's over."

"Home," muttered Champdor. Then, loudly, "I want to go home. I never wanted to come here." He arose excitedly, grasped Farel by the arm, and walked swiftly out of the camp. "You've got to listen to me, Farel. You'll understand. I know you will."

"Try to keep calm, old man," Farel urged. "Try to keep calm."

He feared an irreparable outburst of hysteria, in full view of soldiers and bearers.

"Keep calm! How can I keep calm? You tell me I'll be court martialed. I'll be kicked out of the army, won't I? What will my father say? What will my family do?"

"What every one does when anything happens—grumble, weep, protest, then accept. If you'll tell me in detail what you did, and the reason for your actions, I may find a way to avoid the court martial."

"You would, Farel?" Champdor quieted. "I don't know any reason for my action. At twelve o'clock, suddenly, something told me to go, and I went."

"Were you afraid?"

"Yes."

"Why? Of what?"

"You know—death, mutilation."

"Do you want a bit of advice, Champdor?"

"Yes."

"Don't say anything like that to any one else. I should be the one to accuse you, but I can't. Frankly, I pity you. In a soldier, cowardice is a fatal disease. Better say you misunderstood. You'll be blamed and sent back to your little garrison, and all will be said."

Champdor broke out laughing:

"All will be said, eh? If I receive a public reprimand, my life's done. My father——"

"—has nothing to do with it," said Farel. "You stand on your own feet. Tell him it's his fault for having had you transferred here."

"Then—no money. I couldn't live, pinching every penny on a lieutenant's pay. Figure out what I need every two weeks—two francs fifty centimes for laundry, cuffs and collars, even turning them around, dirty side in—I have seen others try it!"

"Some manage," remarked Farel.

"Not I."

"Marry money, then."

"Money marries money. I have no title—nothing."

Farel became impatient.

"Then chuck the army for good. Go into business. You wield a neat pencil and write fairly well. I can easily picture you making a success in an artistic profession. You're miscast, old boy. You're not a soldier."

"I know it. But I'm afraid to——"

"You remind me of a four-year-old boy, refusing one thing after another, and not knowing what he wants. Patently, I can not help you out if you insist on staying in the service. My duty is——"

Champdor's face flushed. His pupils dilated.

"This is a lot of fuss over a handful of negroes," he said. "A hundred can be recruited for each one lost. I'll accept no favors from you, and I'll guarantee that I'll not be court martialed." He drew breath. "I have influence. We will see. If Combeau heckles me—" he swept the air with an open palm, significant of destruction—"You smile? You don't believe me? My uncle will be cabinet minister again."

"There's a limit to what pull can do."

"There's no limit—for me."

"All right, all right," Farel humored him. "Let's start the men off. N'Golo is only ten miles away. It's thirty good miles to Niagassola."

At mention of N'Golo, Champdor's bravado left him. He allowed Farel to give his orders.

He made no protest when Farel commandeered his horse, explaining that as he had walked all night he was entitled to the mount. Champdor took no notice of Kalogue, who trotted at his heels, looking up at him with adoration. Soon, he made his way to the center of the column, immediately behind the bearers, and trailed his feet in the dust wearily.

"I told Lieutenant I wanted to go back and help thee," Makam Tiaba remarked, drawing up to Farel's stirrup. "He said no—that thou wert dead."

"He did rightly," Farel cut him off shortly.

Tiaba, startled, subsided, and allowed the horse to outdistance him. What was Farel to do? He could not allow discussion of a white man's orders by a native sergeant. Truly Champdor was placing him in an awkward position in more ways than one.

Farel cursed at the indiscriminate placing of shoulder-straps on a man, and believing him, thanks to these symbols, able to command.

But was Champdor to blame? He could not help what he was. And Farel could not very well have placed Makam Tiaba in charge of the second detachment. The inference would have been obvious. Combeau was perhaps to blame. Again, no. He had acted under orders, or at least under suggestions from persons he could not afford to displease.

If traced to its source, yesterday's disaster was the result of a bad system; the nation which tolerated it was to blame. Of course, it was said "favoritism is banished from the Army." Champdor was a living example of the contrary. Left to himself, the heedless officer would have vegetated in his garrison town, being promoted when his years of service warranted promotion. Had a war come he probably would have done his duty well, surrounded by white men and familiar scenes. Champdor was not to blame. Not to blame—that was quickly stated!

If one follows the theory of attentuated responsibility, no one is to blame for anything. Of recent date it was quite usual to blame heredity, environment, and what not, for a man's failings. All very well in theory, but out of place in a soldier, Farel decided. Fighting is a world-old business, and its code is as ancient. A captain does not leave his ship until the last, an officer does not abandon his post.

THAT night, Champdor attempted suicide.

The day, it must be admitted, had been particularly hard on a nervous, imaginative fellow like Champdor.

Twice, when the trails permitted, the riders of Fabou had flanked the little party, firing from the saddle. Bullets had whined through the ranks, men had been hit. Champdor, his white uniform conspicuous among the bearers, had several narrow escapes. Each time, before he could show fear, Farel had been at his side with encouraging words. The warriors hung on doggedly, still hoping that an unforeseen twist of fate would reduce the lead taken by the Boure mission. The distance to Niagassola dwindled gradually. Farel counted the miles with no little anxiety.

He reasoned that news of the engagement must have reached Niagassola. The tomtom telegraph had rumbled all day. The natives knew about the fight by the river bank, and certainly some of them would inform the captain, commanding the fort. Farel knew him well, knew the lieutenants with him. They were not of the Champdor type. Personal safety never entered their heads when a white man was in danger. They would come out to meet him.

He admired the endurance of his men, *Tirailleurs* as well as bearers. There was no need of threats or promises to hasten the latter. The fear of capture gave them wings. Several times during the day he had allowed Champdor to ride the horse, and himself gone to the rear guard, until the accumulated fatigue made him totter on his feet.

When he visualized what this march would have been had Champdor held his place, he cursed bitterly. After the severe shaking up before the village, Fabou's forces would have been discouraged by another check at the pass. Instead, the warriors had come upon the dead bodies of the *Tirailleurs*, Fabou had probably ordered the heads cut and planted on sticks along the road. The men in the yellow *boubous* were doubtless gloating over these heads far more than they regretted the two or three hundred men they had lost while rushing the village walls. The moral effect he had counted upon was lost. In the light of developments, his persistence in staying in the village until the time stated for departure, showed merely stubborn courage and no skill. A success never has to be explained, a failure always. Farel had much to think of on that journey to Niagassola.

At seven, with darkness deepening, he ordered a halt of an hour. Then the march would be resumed, and carried on until the post was attained, toward dawn.

Tired, he lay down to snatch a few minutes' nap. And lost sight of Champdor.

A revolver report brought him to his feet, wearily. Then realizing that no one but himself and Champdor possessed a revolver, he ran toward the spot from which the sound had come. Makam Tiaba preceded him.

Twenty yards away, in the bushes bordering the trail, they found the lieutenant, sprawled out. He held the weapon in his right hand. Farel rapidly felt his heart, then his head. His fingers came away moist, sticky.

"He's hurt. Carry him back, Tiaba."

Tiaba slipped one arm beneath the knees, the other under the shoulders, and lifted the limp body. He brought Champdor back within the safety zone formed by the cordon of sentries.

"Light a lantern, Tiaba."

The sergeant obeyed. As soon as the yellow glow bloomed in the obscurity, the riflemen fired from the bush. The bullets whined, landed all about with the peculiar *ff-flack!* as they thudded into the ground. Farel found the wound, on the side of Champdor's head, a graze from temple to top of skull. The hair was singed. There was no doubt but that Champdor had tried to end his life.

Decidedly, the big officer was not meant to handle firearms. He had not even been able to shoot himself. The impact of the lead had stunned him and that was all. The bleeding was already slacking.

"Nothing much, Tiaba," Farel informed the sergeant. "Probably one of the blacks hit him by luck. Put out the light."

Tiaba, leaning toward the lantern, his face illuminated brightly, stared at him, lips apart. Farel's necessary lie did not deceive him. But he made no comment and blew out the flame. The fusillade stopped.

Farel strove to bring Champdor back to consciousness. He dashed water in his face, shook him, called out, beat his palms. This attempt at self-annihilation was not courage, Farel did not believe that. It was the same sort of thing that Champdor had evidenced since danger became manifest. Nevertheless, Farel was touched. He realized the mental torment that Champdor must have undergone to make him choose such a ruthless course, when all his being cried out for self-preservation. It was a kind of negative courage.

Champdor grumbled, coughed.

"Mother——"

The lieutenant did not smile. That word was often heard on the lips of men when dying or in extreme danger.

"You're all right, old man, take it easy," he admonished.

"You—Farel—I—I missed myself, didn't I?"

"Absolutely. Bad style, yours. The barrel should never be held parallel with the head. Muzzle against the roof of the mouth is the best, I have been told. But it's over now. I'm glad you failed."

"What shall I do! What shall I do!"

"Forget it. Fate did not want your end now. Have a drink."

Champdor gulped at the bottle offered him, filled with cold coffee strengthened with brandy.

"I wanted to get it over with," he explained. "It's this way, Farel: There's never been a coward in the family, *my* family," Champdor resumed plaintively. "My father is a pen-pusher now but he was in the *Cuirassiers*, in '70. You know what that means. His father, Colonel Champdor, was in Algeria. A friend of de Montagnac, the hero of Sidi-Brahim. My great-grandfather, in eighteen-twelve——"

Farel had no interest in the family history, but he strove for patience, listened long to the ramblings of Champdor, who insisted on unearthing ancestral deeds of valor for his admiration.

At the first pause, he interjected:

"I can see your point. You may have acted rightly. But I want you to promise me now that you won't try again. If not for your own sake, for mine, and the men with us. Suppose you had succeeded, and then I had been killed tonight? All goes well as long as there's a white man, but——"

"I'm not much good as a white man."

"You made several mistakes. But they have faith in you. Faith, my friend, is the bulwark of old husbands and young soldiers." Farel arose and stretched his muscles. "Well, you succeeded in keeping me awake during our rest hour. We're going on now."

He found Tiaba.

"Stay with the lieutenant—he is not well. Understand?"

"I hear."

"Don't let him stray too far from the trail." He hesitated. "See every move he makes."

"I have seen. I know. Fear nothing."

"If I am hurt, thou—well, help the other officer."

"I hear," replied Tiaba.

Farel, when he turned, could see the southern sky suffused with lights, the fires of Fabou's Army. But the enemy did not lose contact. Never had Farel seen such tenacity displayed by natives. Usually they were more than willing to live and let live during the sunless hours.

The bushes were swarming with riflemen and spearmen. Farel felt no worry concerning the *Tirailleurs* who, with bayoneted rifles, were a match for both. But the repeated attacks on the bearers burdened with their head loads was another story. Several had been wounded. Farel decided to organize a defense against this harassing business. Knowing that his white flannel uniform was dangerous, marking him as a target, he swiftly changed into a black tunic, discarding his helmet for a *chechia*. In this manner he disguised his silhouete, all that could be seen in the night. Rifle in hand he led the counter attack, running on the side of the bearers. When he joined the pillage-mad warriors, butts and blades came into swift play. But for every man dropped, two appeared.

Whether through fatigue or nervousness due to the prolonged strain, he forgot a self-imposed rule of long standing—never to speak French when engaged in night patrol work. A number of Fabou's men wore headgear similar in shape to the *Tirailleurs' chechia*. Several times he had momentarily mistaken one of his men for the enemy. A rapid exchange of words had straightened out the situation. Farel had become careless, scrambling up the embankments of the road into the bushes. Aware of the folly, and believing himself closely followed by his men, he turned, to see near at hand a round head, skull cap—a blade.

"We go back to the road," he said in French.

He turned to go.

A prickling sensation, changing to a burning intense pain, shot through him. Suddenly weak, he fell on his hands and knees. The pain was repeated. He thought of Tekouba, left by the roadside, pierced with bayonet thrusts. This was the end.

"Help, *Tirailleurs*—help!"

He seemed to roll over and over in emptiness. His brain reeled. The harsh ground was against his cheek, his fingers clawed weakly at the grass. Then a myriad tiny lights crackled and fused before his eyes, an intense cold wrapped him, sweeping through his body like an ice-tide.

He lost consciousness.

THE light was soft, subdued. A strange smell, which he finally identified as powerful disinfectants, caught his nostrils. The feel of a cool sheet over his back gradually made itself clear in his newly aroused consciousness. He tried to move, cautiously. He was aware of stiffness in his back.

"Sacred thunder!" he muttered. "If I don't shake out of this I'll be late——"

Late for what? Imprecise ideas rolled vaguely in his head. Slowly pictures formed, as if he were witnessing the gradual lighting of a stage. The village on the Niger bank, yellow *boubous*, Tekouba lying by the roadside, his massive black head in the meager shadow of the bushes, Champdor— Where in the name of heaven was Champdor?

And what was he doing between sheets?

"I must have been wounded," he thought. "And this is certainly not the trail to Niagassola. Neither is it Heaven—I don't imagine they disinfect the holy precincts, nor hell. Therefore, I was brought back. Hospital. Niagassola. Yes, I'm in Niagassola."

He grunted with satisfaction.

Some one spoke near at hand:

"Do you hear, Lieutenant?"

Farel groaned an affirmative. He strove to speak but could not. He realized, for the first time, his extreme weakness.

"The doctor 'll be glad to hear that," went on the voice. "It's about time. Not a word from you since you came to Kayes."

Kayes—he was in Kayes!

He must ask how long he had been ill, what his hurt was, what had happened to Champdor but his brain reeled.

Immeasurable space—then, he felt hands, he was roughly turned upon his back. A sharp burning pain shot through him. Again, he opened his eyes, saw first the whitewashed ceiling, then, in a misty cloud, several faces bent close.

"Does it hurt? We're turning you over to allow the wounds to supurate. You never noticed before. The orderly told me you spoke this morning."

"Uh-uh," Farel agreed.

"It's all right now. We'll send you home by the next steamer. Don't try to talk too much now."

The voice dwindled. Hands grasped him again, turned him on his stomach. The light drifted away, night came. Occasionally some one spoke. Daylight, night, and the torture when he was rolled over.

Once, heavy steps staggered by his bed. Though he could not speak, his hearing was keen. He heard the soles thumping down the length of the room, downstairs, and then the rasping of wood against iron, followed by the clang of iron wheel on a metal track. True, some men died in the hospitals. That poor fellow! They had him on the little truck of the *Decauville* narrow gage, taking him to the cemetery to be buried.

He must talk, he must ask— What had happened?

Much, much later, a familiar voice made him start feebly. Combeau—no one else but Combeau.

"You say he spoke? What did he say?" the colonel asked.

"Groan— I'm certain he understood. That was two weeks ago."

Two weeks: The shifting of light and night, so closely following—days.

"Doesn't seem to get better at all, does he?"

"He's been a long way, Colonel, he comes back from far. We'll bring him through, I'm now certain. But it will be a long process."

"I'll try to talk to him, anyway."

Came the scraping of a chair, the sound of a heavy man sitting down. Farel smelled a strong odor of tobacco. Combeau—he was certain this was Combeau. The other, probably the doctor, had called him "Colonel."

"Farel, do you hear?"

"Uh-uh."

"Can't you speak?"

Farel tried, made tremendous efforts. But he could not. His other senses seemed acute. He was aware even of the slightest noise. From his bed he could see the knees of Combeau's trousers, and the top of the boots. Why couldn't he speak intelligently?

"I believe he understands," the doctor suggested. "Peculiar case. I don't know whether the spears were poisoned. It seems that way. Affected him with a sort of general paralysis. It won't last, but we must give him time. Do you hear, Farel? You'll be all right, we'll send you to France, soon."

"Uh-uh."

"You see, Colonel, he hears perfectly. If you have anything to say you can be sure he understands."

"I wish to speak to him about——"

"Quite so—quite so——"

Farel heard the doctor's steps thumping along the floor.

"They say you hear and understand, Farel," Combeau said. "I don't want to worry you unnecessarily—something happened after you were wounded which you will learn in time, when you are stronger. Don't worry about it, my boy. I'm leaving the Sudan for a while. But wherever I am, when you need me, write me. I'll help you out all I can, and I can do much when I wish to. Just know that I, who know you better than any one else, believe in you."

What did Combeau refer to? What had happened? But Combeau was asking him not to worry. He must not worry.

Farel felt Combeau's hand on his head:

"I won't tire you. You'll understand all this clearly, when you recover."

And Combeau was gone.

Endless hours followed. He was suddenly lifted to a stretcher, carried down into the courtyard, placed in the rear of a *Lefebvre* wagon, drawn by a mule.

In the wagon it was hot, smelly and dark, and Farel was overjoyed when the stretcher was taken out by several blacks. He heard the tread on the gang plank, caught a glimpse of a white-and-red funnel. River steamer—he was going home. He noticed behind him many other stretchers. They filed endlessly into the deck house. He knew the boat, the *Salamandre;* on her he had come up the river on his first trip to the Sudan. He already felt nearer home.

Whistles, the heaving of the boat. He looked at the mosquito screen two feet above his head. —— shame that he could think—it made him impatient of inaction. But he had hope that the doctor was right. He could move his feet slightly, and occasionally a tremor shook his fingers.

No one spoke to him during the long trip, save the orderlies, and the doctor in charge. They had been informed that he was a special case and made much of him. Often the doctor would bare his torso, feel the flesh, his muscles.

"Farel, you're puzzling us. Do you hear that? You're fooling the faculty!"

One morning, the whistles shrilled again, and the voices of negro laborers resounded throughout the ship. Saint Louis du Senegal. Farel could smell salt on the wind.

"Now for the bad part of the voyage," he thought. "The trip to Dakar by rail. Cinders, stinks and shakes."

He was pleasantly surprized. The bar of the Senegal River was fordable, and a surf boat took him straight to a waiting steamer, bound for Bordeaux. He had a disagreeable moment when transferred from the bobbing boat to the ship's ladder. But the muscular fisherboys, with drops of water clinging to their oily skin as to a waterproof rubber coat, swung him deftly to safety. The indefinable smells of the ship, the smells of all ships, smote him with sweet familiarity.

A cabin, with other wounded men on the bunk above and on the settee across the way, was his home for more than ten days. He was becoming used to this peculiar manner of living, and was even finding a certain comfort. He would have liked to smoke a cigaret, but the orderly could not, or would not understand. He heard some one say, "We'll get into Bordeaux day after tomorrow."

That was in the afternoon, on the sixteenth day out. Government crafts did not make astonishing time between Senegal and France in those days. It was that afternoon that a fly, landing upon Farel's cheek, caused him to bring up his hand.

"That's an improvement," he told himself, and trembled at the sound of his own voice.

When the orderly came in he found him sitting up, counting his fingers.

"A cigaret!" begged Farel.

The orderly fled, returning with the doctor.

"What happened? Why are you sitting up?"

"I don't know. As for sitting up, I think I'm entitled to that, after lying on my face for how many months?"

"Five."

"Have you a cigaret?"

The doctor had a cigaret, many cigarets, all neatly lined in a case. He seemed to feel that Farel had offered a personal insult by rising so bruskely. But the next day he did not oppose the lieutenant's wish to go out on deck. The wounds in his back no longer pained him. They had closed and healed since leaving Kayes.

FAREL was not overstrong in spite of his elation. After his first walk, he took others. He soon found himself strong enough to go to the dining room for his meal. There he saw an officer, Lieutenant Fleurac, whom he had once campaigned with near Bamako.

He rushed to him with open hand—and was brutally conscious that his enthusiasm was not shared.

"When did you get up, Farel?" Fleurac asked coolly.

"A few days ago."

"Ah! Feeling well?"

"As well as ever. The —— inertia left me without reason. One minute I was stiff, the next, all right."

"[illegible]!"

The silence lengthened. The steward approached with various dishes. Several times, Farel caught Fleurac's eyes upon him in an embarrassed stare. While Farel was sipping his coffee, Fleurac gulped down his own and made as if to rise.

Farel laid a hand on his arm.

"Will you do me a favor, old man?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Tell me what's wrong with me—or with you. You look twice as serious as a thirsty monk, and roll your eyes like locomotive headlights."

"Of course, I don't believe a word" mumbled Fleurac, "a word—" His voice trailed off weakly.

"You and I were once pretty good friends. I assure you that I don't know any reason for your embarrassment. I have heard no one but doctors and orderlies for heaven knows how long. I'm just coming to my senses, just beginning to realize who I am and where I'm going. I gather there's something wrong, somewhere." He recalled Combeau's cautious words at the hospital. "Come up on deck where we can be alone."

"Very well," Fleurac agreed.

Farel, bundled in overcoat and blankets, for the vessel was in the Bay of Biscay and the weather cold, joined the lieutenant on the promenade deck.

"How much do you know, Farel?"

"Nothing. I've been practically dead."

"Listen, old man—don't get angry at anything I say."

"Certainly not."

Still Fleurac hesitated.

"Whatever it is, I ought to know," Farel begged.

"When the garrison at Niagassola heard that the Boure Mission had been attacked, the captain in command went out to offer help, and found what remained of the detachment on the trail only eight hours from town."

"I knew we must have got in because I—I found myself alive."

"Champdor, a bloody rag about his head, unshaven, riding in the lead of the resolute group of *Tirailleurs* was obviously in command. While you, Farel, on a stretcher, were as obviously dying. There was no time to waste in Niagassola. The mission was sent on to Kita, while the garrison engaged Fabou's men. In Kita, Champdor made the first report of the mission."

Fleurac went on to explain what was in that report.

The document was a masterpiece of reticent blame. It detailed in full the controversy that had arisen between the two lieutenants of the Boure Mission, in the village by the Niger. Champdor recorded himself as having warned Farel of the extreme danger arising out of Fabou's proximity. Farel, engrossed in his speciality, busy compiling notes for his articles, had laughed his premonitions away.

At last, Champdor, though placed under the orders of Farel, made it clear that his responsibility did not permit him to remain longer in the village at the mercy of an attack. Farel had threatened him with a revolver. Risking his life for the sake of his men, Champdor had quieted Farel. After a long argument, Farel had decided that he would assume the responsibility of his own life, while Champdor retreated toward Niagassola with half the *Tirailleurs* and the bearers. The lieutenant gave as a probable explanation the fact that Farel, for several days, had been feverish from an overlong exposure to the sun.

Champdor, therefore, had made his departure on the eve of attack, progressed northward swiftly. During the next day he had heard firing in the general direction of the village, come to the conclusion that what he had feared had happened. After much hesitation, impelled by his friendship for Farel, he had decided to turn back and help him. A glance at his men convinced him that he should give them opportunity to rest. He had been in camp when Farel materialized out of the bush with but a handful of his section.

Farel had been incoherent, worried to the point of insanity at the thought of how his action would be considered in Kayes. Champdor had been forced to take the brunt of the work, even allowing Farel to ride his horse, as Farel's own mount had been lost in the retreat. During a short halt Champdor had gone out to inspect the sentries, and had been struck by a stray bullet, fired into the camp by the enemy. During his short unconscious moment, the bearers had been cut up severely. All night long there had been fighting. Toward dawn, Farel disappeared. Anxious for his safety, Champdor sought for him, and found him, apparently dying, in the thicket. Farel was clad in a *Tirailleur's* uniform, and the natural conclusion to be drawn, was that he had been trying to escape alone, fearing that the mission was doomed.

Five hours later, the detachment had met the Niagassola garrison.

In the closing paragraphs of the report, Champdor asked leniency for Farel, who, he said, had been overworked and was nervous, given to elation and quick depression. The business of mapping, keeping the troops and bearers in order, combined with the mental labor of his special work, were responsible, in Champdor's opinion, for the surprizing breakdown of the formerly efficient officer.

Makam Tiaba, who had shown "great bravery in combat, and a persistent cheerfulness in the face of the gravest danger," Champdor recommended for the Legion of Honor, the black sergeant already possessing the other decorations within the gift of the French Republic.

Fleurac informed Farel that in the beginning, the opinion in Kayes was against Champdor. Then it developed that the natives of the mission told the same tale of the movement before Fabou's forces. In any case, the questioning of negro soldiers and bearers had to be carried on carefully, for fear of the scandal a white man's defection in moment of danger, would create throughout the Sudan.

It was a question of believing that Farel had broken under a terriffic strain, or that Champdor was the most colossal liar of the age. The latter's evident concern over the fate of his friend, his numerous sincere inquiries as to his health at the hospital, precluded the latter thought.

Farel recalled the night Champdor had

attempted suicide. He himself had realized, that because of the disaster his decision to stay in the village would be regarded as foolhardy. A success never has to be explained, a failure always. And Champdor had been the one to give the explanation.

"Then, Fleurac, I presume I'll face a court martial when I reach France."

"No, it's this way: Combeau never believed you guilty. He even called Champdor into private conference. What went on, no one knows. Combeau shouted angrily, his voice could be heard. Champdor came out, shaky, but smiling. And the court martial talk ended then and there. Fear of scandal—lack of absolute proof perhaps. And perhaps, consideration for you because of your splendid record previous to the mission."

"What's your opinion, Fleurac?"

"When I remember you as you were, I don't believe a —— word of the whole business. But you were under a mental strain—it's been proved by your paralysis. The doctors say you had a shock previous to your wounds."

"There was poison on the spears, the doctor in Kayes believes that! A poison strong enough to keep me in a state of semi-catalepsy for months, a poison that slowly worked out of my system. I know nothing of medicine, but a good deal about native poisons. I've heard of cases similar to mine among the blacks."

"Possibly, but I've met Champdor, before he went back to France, and he seems above that sort of thing—lying. What—what could be his reason, anyway?"

"Perhaps to discredit me——"

"Your *carnet de route* (campaign note book) halted with the statement that Fabou had opened fire. It said nothing of instructions given to Champdor. It is a fact, that had you been calm, you would have made some note of the argument."

"I had no way of knowing it would be needed, and I had other things to do."

"I am only telling you what appears from surface evidence. You must realize that this—this is very embarrassing to me, Farel."

"Yes, I realize that. And I appreciate your frankness."

"I don't understand," Fleurac went on, "and not understanding, I have deferred judgment." Fleurac did not seem anxious to carry the discussion farther. "I have an engagement to play cards. See you again soon——"

With that, he left.

Farel, dazed by what he had heard, leaned over the rail, and stared at the foamy crests of the waves.

Champdor seemed to have covered every angle of his story. He had thought of everything except that Farel might live! An overwhelming rage rose up within him as he recalled Champdor, smiling, pink-cheeked, suave.

It is a police axiom that no man ever covers his trail completely. There existed a flaw in this tissue of falsehoods. But where? And how could he uncover the proof? Makam Tiaba knew something of the truth. He knew that permission had been refused him to go back and help Farel. But Makam was a negro, a non-com; and Farel's conduct would be generally blamed if he caused a "stink." That Makam Tiaba would testify for him, he was certain. But how would his action be taken by the white officers in Kayes? The case had never presented itself before. The man who creates a precedent is leaping in the dark.

THE medical board in Bordeaux kept Farel in hospital for a month. His case had been peculiar, much discussed, and he was kept "under observation."

Then he was sent to the home garrison of his regiment in Toulon. But before being assigned to duty, he received an unsolicited special leave of a year. Being anxious to return to Africa, he protested that he was willing to cut his period of rest to six months. Then, the truth was gently advanced by a kindly major: He was being given this opportunity to gently withdraw from the regiment, to save himself the humiliation of public reprimand. A man as "nervous" as he had proved, could not be trusted immediately with another command—anywhere. Perhaps, much later, when things had settled down, he could apply for service. In the meanwhile, all wished him the best of luck.

Farel understood, bowed, and donned civilian clothes.

He wrote to Combeau who, he learned, was in Indo-China, in charge of a division operating against the Black Flags.

Faced with a long period of idleness, with no family save a few distant relatives scattered throughout France, Farel sought employment. His excursion into the field of ethnology had brought him into contact with various periodicals. He soon found a position at a fair salary on the staff of a political weekly well known for its caustic humor.

In Paris no one cared about his record in the Sudan. Africa was but a name to the majority of people he met. Gradually he sank into the routine of urban existence, became accustomed to a certain restaurant for lunch, another for dinner, became a member of a club. Two to four hours a day he sat at a desk, distilled sarcastic comment on colonial subjects, his assigned task, smoked numerous cigarets, and exchanged impressions on art, women and current events, with the affable, ironical fellow workers of the office.

In a surprizingly short time his recollection of Africa grew dim. One night, on the boulevards, he met a small party of Sudanese negroes, under the escort of a colonial officer. They were talking in a dialect he should have known, but he could not understand.

Combeau's reply, received seven months after his own letter had been written, was encouraging. The colonel advised him that he intended to return to France soon and would probably be assigned to the Sudan. He assured Farel of his complete belief in him. Farel, searching his emotions for the elation the letter should have brought, was amazed at himself. The new life seemed to have gripped him securely. He doubted the wisdom of a return to Africa. It were better to let well enough alone.

Months later, while reading his morning paper on the terrace of his favorite café, he came across Combeau's name. Looking closer, he started.

Combeau was dead.

Somewhere in the bush between Lang-Son and Bac-Le, a Winchester bullet from a yellow pirate's carbine— A brief sketch of Combeau's career, adventurous, filled with exotic names, followed, with an editorial comment regretting the passing of the picturesque figure, a soldier of legend.

Farel recalled the massive face, the strong chin and iron-gray hair, the clear piercing eyes. Gone, finished, Combeau! With Combeau, something of himself seemed to have died; he had been strangely linked to the stern old fellow, linked by an affection passing the commonplace respect and admiration of a subaltern for a superior officer. What was the use of hoping further?

When his leave expired he asked for a three year extension, which was granted without demur. No one cared whether he came back or not.

Not even himself.

Three years. Not a long time when every minute of the day is filled. Farel grew in weight; his face had long since lost the sunburn. There were times, when he looked in the mirror while shaving, that he wondered if this heavy-jowled civilian with the smug expression were himself.

He ate heartily, and his knees creaked often when he walked. The suppleness of body had long since left him. He found that he worried over the choice of a hat or the color of a tie. His greatest thrill was reached at the races, when he laid cautious bets on favorites. Occasionally a twinge of pain between the shoulders reminded him of the past. And, remembering, he marveled that he had ever risked his life for anything as intangible as an ideal.

He congratulated himself on his lucky escape. Had not Champdor played his little trick, he might be lying under a hastily heaped mound, rotting into nothingness.

As his extended leave drew to a close, he decided to resign definitely from the army. What was the use of remaining officially a member? What did he care, in any event, for the opinion of a class of men whose brains were as pliable as their sword scabbards?

HE AWOKE late on a balmy summer day, his head aching from wine and assorted liquors absorbed in the course of the previous night's entertainment.

His evening attire, crumpled in a heap on a chair, demanded attention. Neat, a soldierly habit never forgotten, Farel folded the coat and opened a drawer. The wrong drawer, probably, because he caught sight of his uniform coat, brass buttons tarnished, with the gold-striped sleeves folded across the breast like a dead man's hands. Tentatively, Farel took out the coat. Then impelled by some urge, he drew it on and tried to button it. It fitted fairly well across the shoulders, but the last two buttons refused to slip into the appointed slits.

He threw the garment into the drawer, and closed it with a meaning slam.

He dressed and went out. The morning was warm, the sun shone on the window panes. Instead of calling a cab, he decided to walk. At the end of a quarter mile, he puffed. But he kept on, doing a bit of serious thinking. He was far from being an old man in age. But in body—in point of view?

Other men in civilian life kept fit, why not he? He became aware that the man who has once tasted action softens quickly in the ease of city life, disintegrates in strength more than the chap who has never lived in the open. A lion tamer, for Farel had friends in many walks of life now, had told him that the animals born in captivity were stronger and healthier than those who had been captured, after tasting wild existence.

"I'll do a little fencing and riding, and melt this off," he thought.

He found a bundle of notes and clippings on his desk. Pinned to them a piece of paper bearing the scrawled note:

> Cook up something salty about this. We need it to fill in. Slam the ruthless method of the colonial army, lay on the horror stuff thick. Former nigger-killer yourself, you know how.

Farel smiled. The colonial policy of the government was always something to fall back upon when news of current interest dwindled.

Leisurely he scanned the notes and clippings. In the fall the Chambers would be asked for a new credit for the Sudan. A railway was to be built from Kayes to Bamako. At that time, Farel's periodical was backing a certain mongol-faced politician, who systematically opposed colonial growth and expenditure for that purpose. Too much money was being spent on the Sudan, he thought.

Farel drew out paper and pen.

Against his will memory assailed him—and with it, remorse. He recalled officers who had gone out not properly equipped for a tremendous task, who had died because the government seemed to believe that extra *Tirailleurs* cost too much money.

The sun, through plate glass windows, swamped him in reminiscent warmth. A ray leaped across the polished surface of the desk into his eyes, as the light had spilled into them long ago, on the trails when the noonday heat shimmered over smooth rocks. He glanced at the hand holding the pen; fat, pink, pudgy.

His left hand crumpled the sheets into a ball, which he swept into the basket. He flung the pen on the inkstand, and got up. From the hook behind him, he took his hat.

The "big boss" looked up, surprized.

"I'm leaving," Farel announced.

"I can see you don't feel well," the other admitted. "Ten, tomorrow, if you can. I'd like to have that," he pointed to the papers.

"You don't understand. I'm leaving for good."

The boss motioned to a chair.

"Sit down and talk it over. If it's a matter of salary, I've been thinking for a long time—well, state any reasonable amount. You're more or less alone in your field, and you can hold me up safely. What's the trouble?"

"I'm tired of it here. And I don't want to write stuff I don't believe."

"That, little one, doesn't matter. The one who reads is the one to believe."

"No, I'm through," Farel insisted.

"As you will. I have no chains on you." He scribbled a few words on a piece of paper which he handed to Farel. "The cashier will give you what's due you, and two months over. If you decide to come back it will support you on a much needed vacation. If not, it's a sort of bonus. A rest is all you need, I say, to get such crazy notions out of your hot head. Do your newly acquired principles forbid your shaking hands with me!"

"No," laughed Farel. "Thank you!"

He closed the door, wiped his feet on the mat, and emerged into the street, a free man.

"Free?" he asked of himself.

His next visit was to the minister of the navy. Obviously, his name had been forgotten. He was assured that he would be permitted to reenter the naval infantry soon.

He was. With true governmental psychology, the authorities placed Farel, eager for action, fired with enthusiasm, in a French garrison. It took him a year to obtain his transfer to the Sudan.

"A FOOL—I was a fool to come back!"

A splendid conclusion, Farel told himself, for a man faced with a two years' sojourn.

But thirty-two is not twenty-seven. When five years have gone by it is difficult to grasp the broken threads and start anew. When Farel had made his decision to return he had thought that it would be sufficient to say, "I am what I was."

But he found that he had forgotten a hundred details of army life. The negro soldiers who had been pliable in his hands, appeared to have grown dull, stubborn, during his absence. The sun was no longer caressing, but hit his body with a material impact that dazed him. He, who had seldom been indisposed in three years of campaigning, went down for several days with malarial fever soon after reaching Kayes.

His habits had been shattered. He knew hours when he would gladly have exchanged his present lot for the old desk, when he would have abandoned the mess-room for the dining hall of a big hotel, with music, lights and all the trimmings he had scorned. His supply of cigarets gave out quickly. He could not find the same brand in the canteen. He suffered out of all proportion to this slight privation, he who had lived on canned beef and boiled rice for weeks on a stretch.

And Kayes also had changed.

Civilization, or rather the outward, material evidence of civilization, had crept up the Senegal River. Buildings, huge when compared to the flimsy structures that had sheltered the French advance in Farel's time, loomed high above the stream. The artillery department had erected long sheds for supplies. The white traders had come. There existed several cafés. On the railroad embankment that cut the town in halves, locomotives whistled and panted, car-wheels rattled over fish-joints.

A subtle change had taken place among the natives. The wealthier black traders were arrogant, with an absurd self-esteem they had never possessed under the iron grip of their own chiefs. Farel often encountered little boys, books in hand, minus trousers, but already well grounded in the rights of man and citizen, though less well grounded in his duties. The problem that always arises when two races different in color and texture of soul come together was beginning to assume importance.

As for the warlike native chiefs, there had been several campaigns since Farel left. Fabou, after his failure to capture the two isolated white men, had been replaced by Malinkamory, another brother of Samory. Malinkamory, in spite of his willingness to fight, met with no great success. The columns sent against him cut through his his forces. Samory, tired of constant defeat, demanded peace. For several months now, he had left the French alone. His armies were engaged against a native rival, Fama Tieba, of Sikosso.

ONE afternoon, his work over for the day, Farel left the Gallieni Pavillon where he was quartered for a stroll along the tree-lined avenues.

The heat was still intense, but the coming night brought with it a suggestion of a breeze. Farel gained the long boulevard, parallel to the river, which led to the powder house, the hospital and the cemetery, the beginning, the middle, and the end, as he had often remarked.

A native, passing by, glanced up into his face, recognized him after five years and hailed him joyously. Farel shrugged. To think that he had ever considered negroes likable, that he had trusted to their instinct! This black, no doubt, would have admired Champdor.

He reached the cemetery, passed between rows of crosses and looked at names. Yes, so and so had got "his" at last. By the dates, he computed which of the graves might have been his, had his military life gone on uninterrupted. The name on this cross was that of a captain he had once served under, a genial chap with a wife and two children. Farel touched his helmet perfunctorily.

He had an hour to kill before dinner, and so he kept on walking. He passed through a group of native huts. Before him, children trooped, begging for a coin. He sent them away gruffly.

Few white men came here. Probably at this hour they were gathered about their absinthe. That was one solution of a problem—drink. One absinthe would deepen the gloom. Two would lift the spirit. And by the fourth or fifth troubles vanish.

No white men here—he was mistaken.

A second lieutenant walked ahead of him, the single gold stripe scintillating on each sleeve. Evidently he was not easily affected by the heat, for he wore a dark broadcloth uniform, and high boots. Farel was surprized at the man's bulk and the stately step. He glanced at the great hands in white cotton gloves, dress gloves. Decidedly the fellow went in for show.

Impelled by a longing for companionship, Farel hastened his step, reached the white-helmeted figure.

"It's a warm day," he suggested, for want of a better remark.

"Quite warm," remarked the other, turning toward him.

Farel started. The second lieutenant was black! One of the few commissioned officers of his race.

"I'm glad to see you again, Lieutenant Farel," he said gravely.

"Makam Tiaba!"

"I did not hope to see you again, Lieutenant. *They* told me you had gone for good."

Farel was surprized at Tiaba's ease of expression in French, at his use of the formal *you* instead of *thou*.

"I compliment you on your promotion, Makam. And on your French."

Tiaba lifted his heavy shoulders wearily, another French mannerism.

"I did not desire to become more than a sergeant, Lieutenant," he declared. "But they said I should. I was sent to Dakar, where I learned French—and something of reading and writing."

"What are you doing now?" Farel asked.

"Say *thou*, Lieutenant," Tiaba begged. "It will seem more like old times."

Makam Tiaba did not seem his good-natured self. He was evidently annoyed.

"Art thou happy, then?"

"Not as formerly. Things have changed."

"How?"

"I'm an officer. More than other blacks and less than a white man."

"Foolish reasoning, Tiaba," chid Farel. "Why dost thou say that?"

"I cannot explain. While acquiring this rank and the knowledge of French, I have lost much. My men trusted me as a sergeant. Now when there is a white man near-by, even if only a corporal of infantry, they look to him when in need. My section seems to feel that it is being discriminated against, not being commanded by a white man."

Farel knew the truth of this, but he felt genuinely sorry for Tiaba, who was undergoing his transformation.

"They'll get used to it," he consoled. "As time goes, more and more will blacks become officers. And the *Tirailleurs* will end by liking warriors of their own color to lead them."

"I doubt that," Tiaba protested. He pulled a metal-cased watch from his pocket, glanced at the dial. Then, noticing Farel's amused glance, "Thou seest, Lieutenant, the sun is not good enough for me any more. I use a watch instead of the shadows on the ground. I have installed my home close to here, and was getting back from the barracks for the evening meal. I am not as others who live in town when they become officers." Farel did not comment, so Makam went on. "Wilt thou come and see my place?"

Together they entered a court-yard, where thin chickens were cackling. Several huts, large, clean, occupied an angle.

"Thou art wealthy, Makam Tiaba."

"My pay means more to me than a white man."

He called out and several women in gorgeous *boubous* issued from the huts.

"My wives." Then Makam indicated children of varying ages. "My pi'c'kins."

"Almost enough to form a section!"

"They won't be soldiers," Tiaba informed him. "The taste for fighting is not in them as it was in the boys of my time. They go to school."

Farel thought he discerned a note of regret in his former non-com's voice.

Makam Tiaba suddenly left him, disappeared into a hut. That was his first departure from white man's courtesy. Farel was glad that the big black had preserved at least one of his customs. A departure is explained by its purpose and needs no apology.

The native officer returned soon, followed by a short woman, younger than the others, and better looking.

"Dost thou know her, Lieutenant?"

Farel shook his head.

The woman was like other Malinke women save for rather regular, fine features. It was possible that he had seen her around Makam's quarters, years ago.

The woman giggled, shrilly.

"I be Kalogue!" she announced.

"Allah be praised, thou art grown!"

In five years Kalogue had become a matron. Another five years and she would be aging. Life sped quickly for women in the tropics.

"Thou wert almost a warrior once, Kalogue," Farel said. "Dost thou still know how to climb cliffs?"

"I catch pi'c'kin now," she said proudly, and indicated the hut.

Tiaba dismissed her with a gesture.

"You were gone," he explained. "Her village was in the region of the fighting. I kept her with my women, and married her."

'The—the other lieutenant—did he not say what should be done with her?"

"Lieutenant Champdor left for France, and gave no orders. Then—" Tiaba paused, hesitated—"I know all. But I could not speak."

Farel remembered that he had not allowed Tiaba to speak, to discuss Champdor. And he still felt that he had done right at the time.

"What's past is past," he declared. He called Kalogue, who was volubly speaking to the other women, probably retelling her exploits in the Boure. "I promised thee a woman's necklace once. It shall be thine soon."

"There is no need," Kalogue assured him in a dialect. "Makam Tiaba, my huzband, has already given it to me—when I spoke of thy promise. See!" She held up a string of gold pieces for his admiration.

Tiaba had redeemed his chief's promise as his own—naturally. It was best for Farel to accept this added mark of loyalty—naturally. And so nothing more was said.

Again Makam's watch flashed from his pocket.

"Thou wilt be late for dinner, Lieutenant, unless thou dost ride. My horse is here."

As Farel rode away, he realized that the veil hanging between himself and the past was lifting. Makam Tiaba, with his frank manly talk, had been refreshing. He had brought up a wave of remembrance, not memories of injustice and bitterness. With Tiaba's testimony he could puncture Champdor's statements to a great extent. But was it worth while to rake up the past? And, again, the old question faced him, unavoidable as ever. True, Tiaba was an officer now, his word counted. But he was black, and Farel was puzzled over the peculiar ethics of the case.

Before going up to his room he halted in front of the bulletin board, an old habit. Telegraphic news from France was often posted there, beside the notices and orders more immediately concerned with the military activities in the Sudan.

He recalled that the list of officers to be assigned to the next column had been announced for tonight.

His name was there, heading the lieutenants, followed by Sparbes and Besans. Besans was an artilleryman, Farel did not know him well. Sparbes, he had met recently, a young man, not over twenty-five. Farel's four years out of the army and his blurred record had kept him from being promoted, so that of the men he had known not one was still of his rank. He was starting again, at the bottom. The others had gone up, and he found himself with new arrivals. Perhaps the captain in command——

He looked closer at the paper.

He had half expected what he saw.

GUSTAVE CHAMPDOR

He neither started nor cursed. He could see the name as it had looked in Combeau's clear writing on the letter he had received in Kita. Then it had struck him with a premonition of evil.

Why was Champdor returning? Why had he himself come back? Had he been a fool?

Perhaps not.

IT HAD been his custom since his arrival to ascend to the masonry terrace for his after-dinner smoke.

The gun platform, in the dim glow of the new moon, seemed an islet detached from the rest of the universe and suspended in the limpid sky midway between the gleaming river and the stars. The silhouette of a sentry, vague, could be glimpsed at the far end. The metal of the Hotchkiss quick-firers glowed like dull silver in the pools of shadow cast by the mountings.

A tall form, in white tunic and trousers, with the glowing tip of a cigaret growing and dwindling at each puff, approached. Farel recognized Sparbes, the lieutenant he was to aid in the handling of the *Tirailleurs* when the column set out. Sparbes was gaunt, elongated, with an exaggerated length of arms and legs. A long mustache split his face in two, causing him to resemble a hungry cat.

"Am I disturbing you?" he asked. "Want to be alone?"

"No," Farel held up his cigaret. "Just finishing this."

"You're queer these days," offered Sparbes, thoughtfully.

"How—queer?"

"In turn gloomy and elated. In —— half the time, seeing angels the rest; judging by your expression."

"An observing turn of mind, yours," Farel said light.

"Not as a rule," retorted Sparbes. "But when I see a fellow like you fretting, I wonder if there's anything I can do to help him out."

Farel was not surprized. For two weeks he had been almost constantly with Sparbes, busy clearing up the immense detail work that accompanied the sending out of a column. Farel liked Sparbes. Half amused, half interested, he had perceived Sparbes' growing friendship after a first period of doubt. He had "heard" perhaps. All this without a word spoken of the past. Sparbes was too young to conceal his inner thoughts. Farel now put him at ease.

"You've heard things against me, Sparbes. You were told that I was an untrustworthy sort of fool."

"Brutally put, that's it. But I'll tell you right now, I don't give a —— for what any one says!"

"Experience will teach you that you are absolutely wrong there. There is never smoke without fire. I merely inform you of that general fact, with all due regard for your youthful impulsiveness and loyalty."

"I have been in the habit of forming my own opinions since I was permitted to don trousers. I have seen more then a little of you in the last few days, and—well you know what I mean."

"I think I do."

"What monstrous juggling of facts went on, I can not tell," Sparbes said, hinting for Farel's side of the story.

"I'm in a difficult position. I'd rather not talk without proof."

"Even to me?"

"Even to you."

"That's what lost you, Farel! First you couldn't talk. Then you didn't."

"It was a matter between white men."

Sparbes seemed about to speak, then, deferring to Farel's expressed wish, he remained silent.

"Champdor is in town, I believe," Farel said.

"Yes. In the building. Had dinner with the commander-in-chief, tonight. I came up to tell you. The others are talking, wondering what will happen when you meet."

"I'm going down now, then——"

When they entered the room, Farel became aware of a sudden stop in the conversation. Behind him he could hear an expectant rustle from the men who had followed, unwilling to miss the meeting between the two officers of the Boure Mission.

Champdor was in the midst of a group of officers, and perfectly at ease. His figure still held the suggestion of tremendous vitality. His new uniform, gold braid at shoulders and sleeves, the embroidered regimental number at the coat collar stood out as conspicuously among the baggy whites, as did his smooth, pink skin among the faces tanned by the too strong sun, or yellowed by fever.

Aware of the sudden silence, Champdor glanced about him, saw Farel near the doorway.

Without a trace of embarrassment or emotion, he strode across the floor, hand outstretched.

"Glad to see you again, Farel."

"Good evening, Captain Champdor," Farel replied. "Lieutenant Sparbes, *mon capitaine*, our comrade."

"I have asked for another officer," Champdor announced, after acknowledging Sparbes' salute, and shaking his hand. "I have been granted two companies, and thought it advisable to have a third infantry officer. A native sub-lieutenant, fresh from Dakar, I hear."

While he spoke, heels pounded carelessly on the threshold, the hum of voices had lifted again. The long-looked-for meeting between Champdor and Farel was over.

"I think you already know him," Farel went on. "Makam Tiaba, who was sergeant in our days."

"Tiaba," Champdor continued to be unruffled. "An excellent fellow if I recall rightly."

Farel, for the first time, noticed that Champdor's hair at the temples was gray, almost white. That was the sole change.

"We will not delay long in Kayes," the captain informed his lieutenants. "Knowing you, I am certain that everything has been attended to."

Farel bowed his acknowledgement of the compliment.

That was all. A few commonplace remarks, and Champdor took leave, returned to the group he had been talking with when Farel entered the room.

"Not at all what I expected," Sparbes said, after they had passed through the outer veranda.

"What did you expect?"

"I believed he would be nervous. He—he seems quite a decent sort."

Farel nodded.

"He *seems*—" Sparbes rectified.

So Sparbes had at first been impressed by Champdor's genial manner! Farel was grateful for the subtle correction. Here at least was a man who went behind the first effect of Champdor's magnetic charm, admitted that which was apparent—and reserved judgment on the character.

"And he's to be in command," Sparbes resumed. "I think many things will be clear before this column gets back."

The column under Champdor was to move against Ahmadou Cheikou, King of the Tukuleurs.

While the French were engaged against Samory, Ahmadou had interfered with the commerce of the newly acquired territories. He had permitted his men to halt both the land caravans and the canoes that sought to travel down the Niger to Segou. Repeated demands for consideration had been laughed at. One of Ahmadou's leaders had declared that the protests of the French concerned him less than a mosquito buzzing near his ears. So that, to uphold the nation's dignity, Ahmadou Cheikou must be chastised. There was also the incidental fact to be considered. Ahmadou held land that France wanted.

The first part of the route of the column was identical with that followed by the Boure Mission, passing from Kayes to Bafoulade, then through Kita and Niagassola, on to Niafadie, ending at Siguiri, but a short distance from the village where Farel had fought Fabou.

At Siguiri, two eighty-millimeter mountain cannon, under Besans, the sub-lieutenant of artillery, would arrive from Bamako to join the outfit. There, too, Champdor would find his supplies, and bearers to transport them. With a full supply train and the two guns, Champdor then would follow the left bank of the Niger toward the territory of Segou, where Ahmadou had massed his men.

THEY passed the spot where Farel had been wounded, then where Champdor had tried to end his life. The captain had not said a word, the expression of his face had not changed.

When the column marched into Siguiri, Champdor was informed that the expected bearers had not been gathered. There were reasons for the failure of the officials to obtain the numerous bearers needed by a column of Champdor's importance.

For nearly ten years, the country had been devastated by swarms of armed men. Bearers had been requisitioned in great numbers during that time. Many had died at the task. The survivors asked for nothing, except to be allowed to till their land in quiet. Neither promises of reward, nor appeals to their loyalty to the French, stirred them to action. They had learned that the bearer's life was not a bed of roses. A heavy burden which wore the scalp raw, lash-blows from the overseers when there were no white men about, the risk of being slain by the swarming riders of the native chiefs combatting the French—that was the bearer's lot. The money compensation, although considerable, was not sufficiently tempting.

Champdor was informed, however, that between Niagassola and Niafadie he could find all the bearers he desired. The captain could well ask why he had not been informed of the fact while passing those towns. He was forced to accept the situation as it was, not as it might have been.

The last expedition against Samory had freed a horde of captives, toughened to the head-loads, and not yet attached to homes by the possession of land. These men would be glad to resume for pay the work they had formerly done for nothing.

Thereupon, Farel and Sparbes were sent back to recruit them.

The work was absurdly easy. Not only were the men willing to go but they would take their families with them, as they had done under Samory. For every bearer engaged, Farel thus obtained several unpaid substitutes, the men's wives, who would relieve the lord and master of his head-load part of the time, thereby keeping the transportation gang fresh. Also the presence of women and children would prevent desertion should trouble develop. Family loyalty is a strong instinct in the Sudanese negro.

The trip to Nagassola would have been eventless, had not Sparbes, while examining a new sporting gun, lacerated his thumb in the lever. Farel, knowing how an apparently insignificant hurt could develop if not attended to, coaxed him to consult the doctor of the outpost.

The *toubib* doctor, a good-natured fellow, thirty-five years old at the most, was the possessor of a black beard of extraordinary length, admired by negroes, who measure distinction by inches of chin ornament. He had been at the post two years, and was much interested in Sudanese plant life, confessing to having published several papers in a medical magazine. Farel told him of many popular beliefs concerning the herbs used by the fetish-men to cure illness and to poison their enemies.

During the conversation, the doctor took the time to open a large book, and write casually.

"Are you writing about my thumb?" Sparbes asked curiously.

"Yes. And the nature of your wound. It is herein recorded that Sparbes, Achille, Lieutenant in the first Sudanese *Tirailleurs* and presumed to know a rifle from a pitchfork, injured his hand on a carbine. You can never live that down."

Farel looked up.

"Do you always do that? I mean, is it just a habit with you, or do all *toubibs* keep a record?"

"All military doctors, yes. With us, out here, it serves a double purpose. We can say at a glance, who, among the *Tirailleurs* were allowed off duty while sick, and when. We can compare the result of various treatments on similar cases."

"How long have the records at this post been kept?"

"I don't know. Probably ever since the beginning. They're left here to help the next chap."

"Is the register for 18— here in Niagassola?"

"Should be."

"Could I have a look at it?"

"Why?" the doctor asked curiously.

"During that year I was brought into this post on a stretcher. I'd be curious to see what the immediate verdict was."

The doctor rubbed his palm over his high forehead.

"I don't know whether it's quite regular —how much of a private document it is," he objected at first, "but I don't see the harm. I guess none of the others are over-modest concerning their ailments."

He got up and went to a closet in a corner of the white-washed room, fumbled with several large books, glancing at the dates.

He handed Farel the requested record.

While Farel turned the pages, Sparbes engaged the loquacious doctor in conversation, asking details on the further treatment of his "wound."

Farel, Raoul. Lieutenant, Boure Mission.

The entry mentioned that Farel had lost much blood, that the spear thrusts "interested" in all probability vital organs, and that he had no chance of recovery. In fact the notation finished with the remark that the lieutenant could not survive twenty-four hours.

Champdor, Gustave. Lieutenant, Boure Mission.

Farel had found what he was looking for.

He knew that Champdor, with a bloody bandage around his head, could not have avoided medical attention. According to record, Champdor had suffered from a laceration of the scalp, near the right temple. The skin was burned, the hair singed. The missile had evidently been fired *de bas en haut*, from below upward.

Farel closed the book and returned it to the doctor.

"The twenty-four hours granted me threaten to become twenty-four years."

"We have a record that beats yours," the doctor offered. "About the time of the Boure Mission, a black was brought in—a chief. His men had picked him up on the trail, and knowing there was a doctor here, surrendered him to save his life. He was like a sieve, bayonet wounds all over his chest. They tell me you could cover five of them with one hand. And he lived. He's around somewhere. Settled down, because he said he couldn't fight us after what we'd done for him."

"Tekouba?"

"That's the fellow! Say, is there any one you don't know around here?"

"I was, at one time, tolerably well acquainted." Farel then told of his encounter with the native leader. "I granted Tekouba his life. As if to reward me, Whoever pulls the strings that makes us dance like puppets through this existence, allowed me to live after suffering similar wounds.

A sort of offering to Fate, the way the fetishists make sacrifices to their wooden gods. The longer one lives in this land, the less one scorns the customs."

When at last they left the doctor, Sparbes was the first to speak.

"You found out something—I saw your face change. That's why I kept him interested."

Then Farel told Sparbes—everything.

It was a relief to break the long silence he had imposed upon himself. He could speak now, he had a proof, a white man's proof.

"If a single lie can be proved, the whole report falls down, doesn't it?"

"Obviously," Sparbes agreed. "You can bring things out anytime now. What are you going to do? Put your case in the hands of the Major at Siguiri?"

"With Champdor under suspicion, he would not be allowed to retain command. As his accuser, I would be sent back. The rainy season would be on before new men could be sent down. The blacks would notice the withdrawal of officers and wonder—then matters would take an unhealthy turn."

"And yet, Champdor is not fit to command."

"We will be three white men on his staff, including Besans. Makam Tiaba will be there also. Champdor, I believe, thinks much of his ability. He knows it was Makam, and not he, who conducted the mission after I was 'truffled.' The four of us can guide him, make him do the right thing. You know we are going to employ auxiliaries, native allies. He makes a splendid figurehead. Better, we must admit, than either of us. After his usefulness is over, then—" He broke off, glanced at Sparbes. "Cold-blooded, you think? His treatment of me held nothing of friendly warmth. I dislike him, speaking mildly."

"An eye for an eye, eh?"

"Something of the kind."

"You seem to hold the belief that revenge is a dish to be eaten cold."

"I've waited five years," Farel reminded him.

"HURRY, sacred sons of camels!" Besans, the artillery officer, encouraged his men.

The native gunners grinned as they unhitched the mules from the limbers. A little friendly cursing set them at ease. The stumpy mountain-guns were hauled by hand behind a convenient rise of earth.

Farel, who had halted his horse nearby, turned in the saddle, and saw the somber lines of *Tirailleurs*, dotted with red *chechias*, swinging into position. The colorful, disorderly mass of the native allies, Bambaras and Bondukes, scrambled forward in turn, split into brooklets of men, which seeped into depressions for shelter.

Before Farel, the mules of the artillery passed, trotted out of rifle range. The indistinct rumor of voices swelled, then he saw Besans leaning over the guns, fumbling with the controls. A breach swung open, the gleaming cylinder of a shell caught the sun, vanished into the gaping tube. With a metallic clang, the breech snapped shut. Besans straightened up, gestured to Champdor, who was ten yards away, on his horse.

The captain nodded.

"What time is it?" Besans asked of Farel.

"Eight-fifteen."

"At nine the panorama over there will be considerably altered."

Six hundred yards away, the massive red and white walls of Besedougou straggled on the flank of a hill; of different heights, built on various levels, they added to the picturesquesness of the scene. The *diomfoutou*, a bit of Sudanese fortification that corresponds well with the castle-keep of feudal days, reared its angular, distorted sides at the eastern end of the town. A gigantic cotton-wood tree, a mass of foliage etched against the blue sky, dominated the town.

Besedougou was the first of Ahmadou's strongholds in the path of the column. Garrisoned not only by the paid troops of the Tukuleur King, but serving as a shelter for numerous raiding bands fled to cover at the approach of the French, the position was a powerful one; moreover, it controlled the trails between Segou and Nioro. According to Champdor's instructions, Besedougou was the most important objective. If he destroyed the stronghold, he would have done his share. A larger column, the following dry season, would move toward Segou to effect the actual conquest.

Farel knew that Ahmadou was not in Besedougou, but that he had charged Diakate, a warrior of reputation, with the defense. In spite of this, if Besedougou fell, a great blow would be struck at Ahmadou's prestige already somewhat damaged by his previous defeats.

"How long will it take you to make a hole for us?" Farel asked of Besans.

"By four in the afternoon, I'll have a breach."

Champdor, field-glasses high, was scanning the soil between his position and the walls. On a white horse, in a white flannel uniform as well cut as a full-dress tunic, epaulettes fringing the shoulders, the gold anchor of the Naval Infantry shimmering on the tall helmet like a star, he was, as Farel had said, a splendid figurehead.

"Open fire, Besans!" he called.

"Watch the tree," Besans said to Farel, "I'm using it as a landmark."

Besans did not know that the cotton-tree was regarded by the superstitious natives as the guardian of their dwellings.

"First piece—fire!" chanted Besans.

The nearest gun crashed. The servers promptly dragged it back into place after the recoil. A dozen yards to the side of the tree, and as many too short, the shell landed on the roof of a hut. A yellow puff of smoke materialized out of nowhere, flashes winked like concentrated lightning. The smoke vanished and dust rose from the pulverized walls.

"Second piece—fire!"

A better shot. Branches rained down. A clamor of astonishment rose from the town. Rifles were fired from the walls. The bombardment continued. Besans, after each discharge, grumbled when his men were compelled to drag the guns back into firing position.

"Five hundred years of artillery!" he said. "And nothing done to save the recoil. We call ourselves civilized!"

Once the range was found, the shells dropped with mathematical precision on the point of the wall designated by Champdor as the likeliest spot for access. Besans varied the performance with an occasional shrapnel deposited in the reserves of warriors in the open places. It was hardly fair, thought Farel, this artillery preparation. He would have felt better perhaps, if the natives had possessed cannon. A good siege-mortar, squatting on the ramparts, would have made the engagement more interesting.

"Farel!" Champdor called out, beckoning.

"Captain?" Farel asked when he had drawn nearer.

"I want your opinion, Farel. I received instructions before leaving Kayes, and I don't believe they apply here. But they have to be tried out."

Farel shrugged imperceptibly. Same Champdor, wanting responsibility shared when the burden was on him.

"I have orders to use our allies exclusively in storming parties. The authorities wish to save the *Tirailleurs*. I have been speaking with the chiefs of the auxiliaries, and they claim their men will not go forward against the Tukuleurs without a white man to lead."

"That was to be expected."

"Makam Tiaba tells me, that without the *Tirailleurs* the assault will fail, that the white man will be abandoned if wounded. What do you think?"

"The difference between the Bambaras under their own chiefs, and our *Tirailleurs* is a sense of duty. The Bambaras are brave—but Tiaba is right. Unless the soldiers show them the way, they will not push the assault to a conclusion. And the white man in charge has a good chance of being killed, or deserted in midfield. The natives are still awed by the reputation of El Hadj Omar, Amadou's father, and hold the Tukuleurs in superstitious dread."

"Nevertheless, I must try to carry out my orders. I will send Sparbes."

"Why Sparbes? Such a choice is usually made by alphabetical order. F is before S, it seems to me."

Champdor met Farel's eyes.

"There are reasons why I can not decently place you in a dangerous post."

"I will relieve you of all remorse, Captain. I demand to lead the auxiliaries. It's my job by rights, and Sparbes should not be made to suffer for our private—disagreement."

"Regardless of any authority I may hold, I couldn't send Sparbes forward without telling you my reason. You realize the—the position I am in," Champdor said unexpectedly. "I wanted you to make the choice."

"It is agreed then."

"Agreed."

Farel left him, and sought the chiefs of the auxiliaries. As he talked to them he realized that they were afraid to storm the walls without the aid of the *Tirailleurs*. The Bambaras were not as reluctant as the Bondukes. These last, in spite of the bravery they had shown against Mahmadou Lamine, at Macadiacounda, were extremely nervous. They had been brought into Segou, far from their homes, and even Ousman Gassi, their commander, was perturbed.

"We came in the belief that we would but help the *Tirailleurs*," he declared. "As for me, I shall take no part in the fight. I have risked my life for the French enough. If thou canst make my men fight, do so."

This was frank, categorical.

Mourdia, the Bambara leader, did not refuse to go forward in person. The Tukuleurs of Ahmadou were his enemies, and his men, although disturbed by the failure of the soldiers to support them, would do their best.

At three-thirty in the afternoon, Farel marshaled the native allies opposite the steadily widening breach. He would charge on foot, refusing to make a target of himself. Looking at the men behind him, he knew that they would fail. But Champdor in this case, was right. Instructions must be obeyed, before another course could be tried out.

Makam Tiaba, blue tunic sparkling with decorations, high boots shining with a mirror-like polish, a pipe-clayed helmet on his head, breast criss-crossed with leather straps supporting revolver and field glasses, lacking not a single item of his rank's designation and privilege, hovered near, scowling.

"Thou'lt be slain," he repeated. "Is the captain——"

Farel cut him short with a gesture.

"Captain Champdor is following orders."

"I will watch thee, Lieutenant. Surely he will not have time to prevent my helping thee, should I be needed."

"Until then, there's nothing to be said."

Champdor had come forward.

"I want to speak to you, Farel." He dismissed Tiaba. "This is possibly my last chance to speak. I have delayed until now—why, I can not say. I want to tell you that I—I'm sorry."

"A trifle late."

"But not too late. One of us may be killed today——"

"You and I have a —— good idea who that will be!" Farel pointed out dryly.

"You never can tell. Don't make it hard for me to speak. When we reached Niagassola, the doctors said you would die. You had no family—nothing. Credit is of no use to a dead man. It meant everything to me. I was tempted——"

"I realize you didn't take much of a chance," Farel admitted ironically.

"Don't think I didn't feel remorse. This thing has been on my mind for five years."

"On mine also."

"I was half crazy—wholly crazy."

"That's the most charitable conclusion."

"I—I'll settle it some day."

"All right," Farel said impatiently. "The time to come out and settle things was when you found out I was alive. Don't annoy me now with your belated sorrow."

"Let me go on."

"I won't waste time listening to your hypocritical regrets!" Farel almost shouted.

"I wish I could take your place this afternoon."

"So do I, probably more than you do." He turned to go.

"I have something more to say——"

"—— you!" Farel concluded.

Champdor's whining had stirred a deeper resentment. He hated the captain with an intense fiery hatred. This last scene was in keeping with the rest. He had lacked the courage to give the order for Farel to lead the assault, but he had had the courage to ask forgiveness, when he, Farel, was going—to almost certain death.

Sparbes had come out to bid him luck.

"You know that matter I spoke about in Niagassola, Sparbes? If I croak out there, take it up for me."

"Don't worry, I will."

Champdor, hovering near for a few moments, went back to his post of observation.

"Good luck, eh, and don't be obstinate," Sparbes advised. "If you see you can't make it come back for the *Tirailleurs*."

"All right—so long!"

Sparbes left.

Behind Farel, the cannon still resounded, but the shells were no longer beating the walls. The *diomfoutou* was at the receiving end.

The lieutenant threw his cigaret away, drew his sword and placed it under his left arm.

"*Na! Na!*" he cried. "Come on, come on!"

A half-hearted shout answered his cry. But he started forward, gradually increasing his stride. He half-turned, saw that he was followed by the swarm of multicolored *boubous*. Both Mourdia, the Bambara chief, and the leader of the Bondukes assigned by Ousman Gassi, rode magnificent horses.

Yet, Farel knew that the real issue rested on him.

From the walls, the fusillade opened furiously. Tremendous cries went up. The Tukuleurs were rejoicing to have an opportunity to fight, after the enforced passivity under the bombardment. The afternoon sun was behind Farel, sent his shadow sprawling ahead at each long leap. The walls of Besedougou were suffused with a red glow; rifle barrels shone. Through the thin cloth, the lieutenant felt the glow on his back, the glow he had craved. He was strangely content that this should be his last sensation.

At almost the same moment, both Mourdia and the Bonduke Chief rolled to the ground with their horses. Mourdia arose, but the other remained where he had fallen, a gorgeous blotch of red and white, over which twinkled the naked legs of the attackers. The Bambara gained his white chief's side, the heavy dull tinted blade of his curved saber jutting from his huge clenched fist.

The gaping hole torn by the guns in the barrier of walls was not far, now. Warriors knelt in the passage, firing.

Farel was on the verge of accomplishing the supposedly impossible; he was bringing a charge of irregulars to its objective, under plunging rifle fire, a test of discipline for trained troops.

Where a white man led, blacks would ever follow.

AN IMPACT whirled Farel about, threw him headlong.

Attempting to get to his feet, he fell back heavily. His left leg was a dead weight now, and a stabbing pain shot through his bowels. He rolled on his side, called out to the auxiliaries to go on—a useless order. The negroes had turned their backs to the wall the moment they realized he had fallen.

The entire party was in headlong flight, *boubous* snapping in the wind. The entire party? He had been unjust. He felt himself being lifted. It was Mourdia, the Bambara chief, living up to his title.

Mourdia had no time for speech. He hoisted Farel to his shoulder holding him about the legs, and trotted after his faithless followers. Farel, who faced the rear, saw the Tukuleurs firing in his direction. After a brief hesitation, a number of them crossed the débris clogging the breach and raced into the open. The white man was a prize worth straining for. He reached for his revolver, in spite of his awkward position. But the weapon had slid from the holster.

His spirit was well tempered, and did not fail him. If it was his turn to pass on, it was his turn. Somehow he regretted his last words to Sparbes. Facing death, his own personal problem faded into unimportance, compared to the magnitude of the work to be done.

Burdened with the white officer, Mourdia was tiring fast. His step faltered, his breath came and went in lung-tearing gasps. In the excitement, the Tukuleur marksmen failed to find their mark. As always, they fired too high.

Abruptly, he found himself among the *Tirailleurs*. The well known crackling of the Gras rifles sounded close by. Mourdia lowered him to the ground, and dropped down himself, his body shaking with fatigue and breathlessness.

Makam Tiaba, the scowl of battle on his face, knelt beside the lieutenant.

"Much sick?" he asked, forgetting his better French, for the "bush-talk" of the non-com.

"Belly—" whispered Farel.

He had looked down, and seen his trousers and the lower part of his tunic red with blood. Makam unbuckled the broad belt, bared Farel's stomach and thighs. Then, seeing that the white man had no helmet, removed his own. The hottest sun could not injure Makam's wool-protected cranium.

He resumed his inspection with cautious fingers.

"No be belly," he announced in a relieved tone.

Farel learned that he had been hit in the groin, a nasty wound, but not necessarily fatal. Makam Tiaba tore the lieutenant's linen shirt, formed a wad which he pressed over the bleeding hole, and pulled up the trousers.

"No bleed no more," he said, and he informed Farel that he had not waited for orders but had started out to help as soon as the white man fell.

That the captain approved his native subaltern's move was soon apparent. Another section of *Tirailleurs* came out to support Makam. Four *Tirailleurs* lifted

Farel and slowly carried him back to the rear.

And the three white men came out to meet him.

IN THE tent shared by Sparbes and Farel, Besans, who lay claim to some knowledge of surgery, extracted the bullet. His unskilled hands probing with the forceps caused the wounded man intense torture. But at last the artillery man stood up, wiped a bullet on a towel.

"What do you think of that!" he suddenly exclaimed.

The missile, identical in shape to the breach loading ammunition, the side grooved by rifling, was a bright silver.

"I should be quite honored," Farel said. "Silver bullets are used against fetish-priests, chiefs reputed to be invulnerable, and *marabouts*. The Tukuleurs must hold us in dread."

Besans grinned.

"On the off chance that more than one was fired at you, I'll comb the grounds after Besedougou is taken. One way of making a fortune. This one will make a nice watch charm."

"No. I'll give it to Mourdia for an amulet—silver bullet dipped in the blood of a chief. Watch."

Mourdia, summoned from the outside where he had been seated with Makam Tiaba, entered, and was informed of the gift. He accepted the bullet with trembling fingers. At that price he would risk his life every day; a marvelous *grisgris* and tobacco—white man's tobacco!

"What's the verdict, Besans?" Farel asked, after the Bambara had left.

"Bad hole, nasty place. You can't walk or ride. You're due for a stretcher ride to Kayes and two months on your back."

"——!"

"If you move your left leg at all, the wound will open. Think yourself lucky that you'll get over it. An inch or so higher and your bowels would have been perforated."

"You certainly play in bad luck," Sparbes remarked.

Besans looked askance at this reference to Farel's last wounds. Sparbes, realizing that he had trampled on a dangerous subject, became embarrassed.

As for Champdor, he smiled.

"He's not as badly off this time," he declared. "When he was picked up on the Niagassola trail he was as good as dead."

The leisurely tone, the genial smile, seemed natural enough. Farel contrasted this self-control in the presence of witnesses, and the agitated pleading manner before the charge.

Besans left soon to attend to the guns, and Sparbes went out to inspect the new line, formed when Makam Tiaba had moved forward.

"I'm glad you returned alive, Farel. Without going into any other reason, let this suffice: Had you been killed, some would have been found to say I had sent you to your death."

"And why should you wish to do that?" Farel asked.

Champdor did not answer the question.

"I have tried to carry out my instructions and failed," he said thoughtfully. "You said once I was not cut out for a soldier—What should I do now? Send the *Tirailleurs* ahead?"

"Not this afternoon."

"Why not?"

"They have just seen a charge shattered and a white man hurt. The auxiliaries would not support them so soon after that disastrous first rush."

"I counted ninety-five corpses between here and the breach," Champdor said, "I realize that the sight of them rattled our men. We could drop shrapnel into the town——"

"Our ammunition wouldn't hold out. Moreover, shrapnel fired against enemies under cover accomplishes little. The few casualties that would result would not lessen the odds against us to any extent. We'd better save the shrapnel to use during the attack, when the warriors will come out into the open to await us," pointed out Farel. "The Tukuleurs in Besedougou are encouraged now and our men are depressed. Let the night pass. With morning, a new day will come. Negroes forget quickly. The defeat of today has nothing to do with tomorrow's fight. Strange reasoning, but how else did Samory keep his warriors in the field?"

"Knowing me, knowing conditions, would you advise me to risk Sparbes?"

"No, frankly. Sparbes is intelligent, brave, with a world of confidence in his own ability. He must not be risked. Don't tell him I said so. He's hot-headed enough to claim going forward as a right."

"Besans?"

"Is a splendid artilleryman, but probably not capable of handling the column."

"I am in command, therefore not at liberty to—to do as I desire with myself. There is left—Makam Tiaba. Do you think——"

"I do. Try him in the morning."

"Thank you, Farel."

He was leaving, but Farel spoke up.

"Tomorrow have me carried out to see the action, will you?"

"If it won't be harmful——"

"It will do me less harm than fretting in here."

"All right."

Without another word, Champdor left.

Farel spent a bad night. His wound pained him. He could not move without waking. When he did sleep his mind was filled with dreams, fantastic imaginings, made up of all the events that had occured since he left Kita for Boure.

He led the natives in nightmare charges against unseen enemies, suddenly discovered himself following a scantily clad Kalogue through the Paris streets and into the office where he had worked. A newspaper kiosk, sprung up in a deserted Sudanese plain, with huge placards. He could discern the headlines: "Champdor column massacred in Segou."

He was transported into the Chambers where fantom deputies held rambling speeches. The leader of the opposition to colonial expansion, bristling mustache and low brow, was suddenly discovered to be wearing the gorgeous *boubou* of the dead Bonduke leader. The figure moved and, as it moved, was changed into Combeau, laughing, juggling with a silver bullet and pointing to a hole in his forehead. What Farel had thought to be a silver bullet turned out to be a bugle, which Combeau lifted to his lips and blew.

The wounded man awoke with a start; the bugles were sounding the morning call.

The camp was alive with noises. The cooks were chopping firewood, the uproar of native voices swelled. On the cot beside him, Sparbes awoke in his turn, stretched and yawned. He rubbed his eyes sleepily and dressed. From some distance away came the excited cackling of a chicken, the piercing laughter of *Tirailleurs*, a fowl destined to the white officers' table was doubtless running for life.

"One would think oneself in a farm yard," grumbled Farel.

Sparbes turned.

"Awake? How do you feel?"

"Rotten."

"All in a life time. I presume it will be my turn today."

"I hope not. But if you get hit pick out a better place than I did. I wouldn't recommend the groin to my worst enemy."

"Don't worry," Sparbes went on, lacing his boots. "Champdor'll not put himself in the way of anything unpleasant."

The mountain-guns had opened fire.

Champdor, fully equipped, thrust his head within the tent, inquired how Farel felt. If he had overheard Sparbes remark, he was remarkably calm.

"I'll send some men for you, Farel," he announced. "Makam Tiaba will go forward."

When he had withdrawn, Sparbes gave vent to his feelings:

"I don't give a —— if he heard me," he declared. "A man has no business snooping about. What is this new thing, Tiaba being given command of the attack?"

"Probably wishes to feel the ground before risking you. He's in a bad fix if he has no one to depend on."

"If he has thought that out by himself, he has more brains than I gave him credit for!"

The men promised by Champdor arrived, with a stretcher. Farel was taken into the open, on the platform used by Champdor as an observation post. The top of the stretcher was braced against a tree trunk.

Beside the breach made the day before, another hole was soon pounded by the mountain-guns. A few hundred yards away, the sections of *Tirailleurs* formed up. Makam Tiaba was conspicuous, gesturing, scolding.

To Farel, the soldiers seemed slothful, lacking their customary dash. Sparbes noticed this as well.

"What ails them?" he wondered.

"Nervous."

"They won't make it," predicted Sparbes.

"They've accomplished harder feats. The companies here were engaged against Samory a score of times. The Tukuleurs don't frighten them."

"Then they're giving a good imitation of fear!"

Makam Tiaba had at last succeeded in pushing every man into place. By gestures, he ordered them to spread out, to fix bayonets. The gleaming blades sprouted swiftly at the end of the rifles.

Champdor lifted a whistle to his lips, and shrilled three calls.

Makam Tiaba repeated the signal, lifted his hand and the lines made the first move forward. In a half dozen bounds the first cover was reached, a line of bushes running parallel with the walls.

"Not bad. No one hit," Sparbes approved.

The native officer stood up again and lifted his hand to his face. The *Tirailleurs* advanced swiftly, from cover to cover. The first man was struck, brought both hands to his stomach, struggled on a few feet and fell. The others kept on.

"The next leap is a bad one," Farel said.

The ground there was level with the walls, and the discharges spread horizontally. As he had expected, several *Tirailleurs* dropped immediately. Some lay where they fell. Others crawled back toward the rear. Makam Tiaba, who now scorned to crouch and stood in full view, was untouched.

The quick piercing whistle again. This time the *Tirailleurs* did not move.

Tiaba walked back to the nearest man, lifted his sword and struck with the flat. The fellow got up and advanced reluctantly, but when Tiaba turned away, he sank back to the earth.

"They're funking!" Sparbes shouted.

Tiaba was manifestly haranguing the *Tirailleurs* to no avail. Not one would make the move. The native sub-lieutenant drew his revolver.

"What can we expect of the auxiliaries, if the regulars quit!" yelled Sparbes.

The captain brought the whistle to his lips, but this time he signaled Makam Tiaba to withdraw, an order that was obeyed with alacrity.

From Besedougou came mocking shouts. The warriors, dancing with joy, could be plainly discerned.

"I'm going to see what's wrong," Sparbes sputtered. "Of all the rotten shows—I can't understand it! Those fellows are veterans."

He galloped down the hillside, across the flat stretch toward Makam Tiaba. Farel saw him halt beside the negro sub-lieutenant. What he said was evidently not complimentary, for Makam gestured helplessly.

Champdor approached breathlessly.

"They won't go forward," he said.

"Do you know why?"

"Afraid?"

"They want a white man, that's all. They don't trust an officer of their own color. Strange thing—the troopers will perform under a non-com. of their race, but put stripes on the same fellow and they go to bits!"

"I never heard of it."

"The evidence is there."

"Would they follow Sparbes?"

"They would." Farel looked Champdor squarely in the eyes. "They would also follow you."

"You think I should——"

"What we said yesterday still holds true. In case anything happens to Sparbes, neither you nor Besans *are* capable of handling the *Tirailleurs*. I may seem rough but this is a rough situation. Sparbes gone, we would find ourselves before Besedougou, in the heart of an hostile country, with auxiliaries and regulars depressed by repeated checks."

"Which would mean?"

"Disaster."

"But as you say, I don't know enough to lead troops. What good will I be—this time?"

"There is no need for maneuvering. What they need is a leader, a figurehead to look up to. Without unduly flattering you, I can say you are that. They admire you, and would follow you more readily than they would Sparbes—or me."

Champdor bit his lips and looked down at the ground. Again the pallor that Farel had noticed before at the mention of danger crept over his face. But when he turned to the lieutenant again he was calm enough, even smiling.

"It's pretty clear that I'm the one to go," he said.

"Certainly we can not withdraw at this time and make ourselves a laughing stock in the Sudan!"

Champdor sat down beside Farel.

"That's what I came out here for, to prove myself something else than what my behavior previously has shown me——"

"Your reputation is sound, Champdor. Live up to it now."

"I mean, I wished to prove myself to myself—and to you. I have brooded over the matter so long that the world seems composed of but two individuals—you and I."

"Unfortunately, it isn't."

"I think I can bluff my way through, Farel—but I'm—afraid!"

"Any man would be frightened before what you will undertake. All you need is a little more strength of will to conceal the fact."

"I'll go, Farel. And I'll be there trying——"

Farel extended his hand.

"You have it in you to do anything! The imagination that caused you to break before danger can help you to disregard it."

"Possibly."

Champdor arose slowly, and walked toward his horse. Farel called him back.

"I want to tell you something, Champdor—I admire you. Now, I'll tell you more: I intended to bring up the whole mess, our mess again. I have witnesses: Kalogue, Makam Tiaba, Tekouba. Moreover, I found in Niagassola the written proof that you lied about your wound. If it will make you more at ease now, you can tell yourself, that when you come back from Besedougou, I'll forget all that."

"It's inhuman to forget—a thing like that," Champdor replied. "I'll go ahead. That's no more than you've done unconditionally."

"It isn't what you're about to do now, Champdor. I decided to drop the matter yesterday—out there."

"Why?"

"I don't exactly know. I felt how small I was, how small you were. How tiny all men are beside the great things that count—a country, a flag—and harming either, even to gratify my little ego, would be a crime."

"Country, flag! Resounding words," Champdor commented. "I think I understand." He broke out laughing, not a nervous laugh. "By —— it works, that imagination business. I feel in me the soul of a warrior!"

Sitting straight in the saddle, for he had mounted, with a smile of self-derision on his face, he drew his sword and lifted it to the salute.

"Farewell, noble Farel, apostle and soldier *par excellence!*"

He galloped away.

He's crazy," decided the lieutenant. "But if it will make him act like a man, why worry?" He added as an afterthought, "I suppose I deserved that grandiloquent leave taking. Country, flag—what an ass I'm getting to be."

He picked up the field glasses abandoned by Champdor, and watched the group composed of Makam Tiaba, Sparbes and Champdor, joined soon by Mourdia and a Bonduke, who was evidently the successor of the rider slain the previous afternoon.

Sparbes was protesting violently. Makam Tiaba wiped his face with the back of his hand. Mourdia and the Bonduke left, going to their respective contingents. Soon four bulky objects were brought forward, each carried by more than one man. When these were deposited on the ground, Farel recognized tomtoms, war-tomtoms.

"That big boy is teaching me something in the handling of auxiliaries!" Farel muttered.

Champdor then harangued the men, his speech was translated by interpreters. Farel looked for the *Tirailleurs*. A strange sight met his eyes. Makam Tiaba was undressing. He had discarded helmet and coat, stood with a *chechia* on his head, his torso bare. Tiaba, removing his insignia of rank, was striving to regain his former hold over his men!

The tomtoms rumbled. Sparbes was coming back.

The defenders of Besedougou, suspecting that the genuine effort was to come now, were silent.

"What did you feed Champdor?" Sparbes asked, when he reached Farel's side. "He's changed into a roaring lion."

"What's he doing?"

"He's only talked so far. But if he does one tenth of what he says he'll do, Ahmadou's pet town is thrice doomed. The auxiliaries are so excited he'll have to hold them back instead of urging them. This is what he said:

" 'We brought you here because we believed you warriors. You men of Bondu, have you forgotten Macadiacounda? Did you fail the white men then? You Bambaras, the Tukuleurs are your enemies, they stole your women, burned your villages! I was told that if I made a hole with the cannon, you would go through. There are the holes and you are here. If I had known that you resembled women and captives more than you did warriors, I would have brought fifty more *Tirailleurs* to take the place of your three thousand. I, myself, will take you forward now to see what you are worth.' "

"Not badly put!" Farel was jubilant. "With a chap like Champdor it's all or nothing. He's a play-actor, a born tragedian. It's just dawned on me. He wouldn't muff a scene like this."

"If Allah wills," Sparbes said piously. "While the interpreters were translating his speech, he winked at me and sang."

"What?"

"Du Salut de notre patrie
Dépend celui de l'univers;
Si jamais elle est asservie,
Tous les peuples sont dans les fers."

"On the salvation of our country
Hangs that of the universe;
If ever it is made a slave,
All peoples will be shackled."

"That's irony for you," commented Farel. "In keeping with our often repeated statement that altruism guides our conquering armies."

"Preserving a sense of humor at this time is a stunt in will power. I couldn't do it, and here I've been despising that poor Champdor."

Three blasts from the captain's whistle interrupted them.

"Curtain call," Farel decided.

The tomtoms were pounding away savagely. For some minutes now, the auxiliaries had been swaying, as if drunk on the sound. The *Tirailleurs* had formed in line, Makam Tiaba was at his post.

Champdor, superb in attitude, rode his horse to the front, held his sword high.

"Satan take me!" breathed Sparbes. "What a man!"

Champdor went forward, at a moderate trot. Behind him raced the *Tirailleurs*, bayonets low and, not ten yards away, the horde of auxiliaries.

The walls of Basedougou were dotted with puffs of smoke. The first cover was attained, disregarded. Men were falling, but the ranks merely split and reformed. More than once, Champdor turned in the saddle, called to the men behind him, pointed at the opening with his sword.

In an unbelievably short time, the distance between the original line and the walls was covered. In another ten seconds, the attackers would reach the breach.

A terrific discharge, held in reserve by Diakate's men, tore through *Tirailleurs* and auxiliaries. The line floated, seemed to be torn to rags. Champdor's helmet was blown from his head. His blond hair emerged from the confusion.

The captain detached himself from the swirling mass and crossed the open space at a mad gallop. Instead of approaching the breach where he would have surely fallen under the bullets, he made for the wall at a point not more than twelve feet high. Farel and Sparbes saw him stand on the saddle, reach both hands for the crest of the mud barrier, the right still holding the sword.

In another second, Champdor stood in full view, outlined against the green of the trees and the buff of the huts, bareheaded, and beckoning his followers forward.

The blue coats of the *Tirailleurs* mingled with the colorful swarm of the Tukuleurs, then the mass of the auxiliaries closed the breach, poured into the town.

For a few seconds, the captain remained on the wall, then he was seen to walk toward the breach, and disappear.

"He's done it," Farel breathed.

"The act was a success," Sparbes added. "Say, Farel, I hope he comes back. I—I——"

"So do I," Farel finished.

WHEN Diakate had been given charge of Besedougou to hold against the French, he had said: "If Besedougou is taken, never more will men see me."

And Besedougou would soon be taken. Diakate, at the breach, had seen the approach of the *Tirailleurs*, had witnessed his men helpless to check the advance.

Yesterday, Far-Eli, once well known in the region and long disappeared, had suddenly loomed before the walls at the head of the Bambaras and Bondukes. The silver bullet had dropped him, and with his fall the onslaught had lost its strength. With Far-Eli gone, Diakate had feared nothing of other white men, for if Far-Eli had failed who could hope to succeed?"

And then a strange face had materialized, a tall warrior with hair the color of gold, riding as no negro could ride, bearing down sword in hand, untouched by the bullets aimed at his chest. The white man had climbed the wall, pointing the road to his followers. This warrior—he was even better than Far-Eli had been.

The Tukuleur chief shook his head to clear his eyes, obscured by the blood flowing from a cut across his brow. The white wool on skull and chin alone revealed his advanced age. The muscles played with undiminished vigor beneath the wrinkled skin of his naked forearms emerging from the folds of the embroidered *boubou*. There was still a chance to win out if the white man were killed. Diakate had seen him fall, had seen blood on his clothing. That had been soon after the storming of the gap in the wall, when the Frenchman had leaped down into the thick of the fighting. Diakate hoped that he was dead.

He retreated step by step before the threatening bayonets, through the narrow gorge-like streets, toward the *diomfoutou*. His men were fighting well. Even the women took part in the struggle. Many of them had come to the front, crouching, and hacked at the legs of the *Tirailleurs* with knives. One by one they were killed. Diakate saw a big, half-naked soldier, with a blade sunk in his thigh, seize a woman by the neck, draw her erect, and plunge his bayonet between the breasts.

The Bambaras and Bondukes were everywhere. Diakate had fought them many years before, when serving El Hadj Omar. They had not been so brave then. And yesterday, even, their courage had not stood the test. What inspired them now if not this new white man?

The open place before the *diomfoutou* was reached. The doors opened, the Tukuleurs poured through, while the attackers massed down below, hesitating. As several of the men sprang forward to drop the cross-bars of the portals, a minor chief addressed Diakate.

"I saw the white man fall. They will lose heart."

Diakate did not answer, but led the way through narrow corridors, up dim stairways, to the chambers above where his harem was gathered. He glanced gloomily at the frightened women, kneeling, hiding their faces in terror. Truly, too much ease spoiled women. The poor men's wives had shown better behavior. He spat upon the floor and left to gain a loophole and inspect the situation.

The doors shook under the hammering butts. On several long poles, *Tirailleurs* were attempting to gain the top of the first wall. Diakate smiled widely—they had believed their task over at the rampart and found the most formidable barrier yet to be passed.

He passed a long pistol through the loophole, pressed the trigger. He knew that he had ended another young life, while he still lived, he who had been already a strong man when El Hadj Omar had come back from Mekka. He recalled the Grand Salaam in Dienne, where he had first heard the flaming words of the Prophet. He recalled other days of battle. He saw the heaps of dead around Medine, the great clamor of "Allah! Allah!" as twenty-five thousand warriors pressed to the attack, certain that nothing could issue from the white men's cannon save water. Flame and steel had spurted. That had been war!

It would have been worthier perhaps had he fallen with so many others, in the full faith in his cause. Now, with the years' wisdom, he felt that the days of black mastery were gone forever. Frenchmen could be killed, but for each slain, two more appeared from the misty coast-line. They cast a spell over the negroes they came in contact with. A man who once took their pay and learned to love their ways, was gone as a free warrior.

"He lives!" some one cried out.

True, the white man had arrived into the central place. He was upon his horse. Yet, he seemed strangely indifferent to the fight. Chin on his chest, he swayed with the nervous shuffling of his mount. His coming was the signal for renewed efforts to burst open the doors. The panels shattered, Diakate heard the trampling of struggling men below.

He straightened up, discovered that his pipe was empty, and threw it to the floor.

He entered the room where the women cooked. A fire still burned in the center of the floor, the smoke escaping from a hole in the roof. He picked up a blazing stick and walked on. After passing many rooms he came to a heavy door, before which a young man was on guard, squatting, rifle across his knees.

"Go down to the floor below," he ordered. "Thou art no longer needed here."

The warrior saw the torch in the firm hand, and his eyes grew wide. He fled so swiftly that he forgot his gun. Diakate kicked it aside with a contemptuous grin and pushed the door open.

He stepped into a spacious room, half filled with boxes and barrels. On the floor were small mounds of dark dust.

He waited until the triumphant shouts of the white men's soldiers rang through the halls, until the wooden stairs creaked under the feet of hurrying men.

"I am very old," he murmured, "and men must die."

His master, the great Omar, had perished by a powder explosion. He, Diakate, by the will of Allah, was to imitate the worthy example.

"Men must die!" he repeated.

He threw the torch to the floor.

WITH a terrific detonation, a column of flame shot up from the *diomfoutou*.

The troops left behind to cover the French camp and the improvised gunpit milled in confusion, shouting, half in delight, at the tremendous spectacle.

Besans, his face scarlet, ran up to the two other officers.

"Did you hear! Did you hear!"

"Couldn't very well help it," Farel commented. "The *diomfoutou* has blown up."

"It's over," Sparbes said, and ran to his horse. "I'm going to see."

Besans, divided between duty and curiosity, at last returned to his guns.

Farel summoned the four men assigned to handle his stretcher, and ordered them to carry him into the town.

The dead and wounded from the three attacks lay everywhere. Two-thirds of the distance to the breach, Farel uttered an exclamation of dismay. Mourdia, face to the sun, sprawled, arms and legs grotesquely twisted. His lips were wide apart, and a thin stream of blood coursed down the black cheeks to the neck. The silver bullet had proved but a weak fetish. A *Tirailleur* squatted behind a bush, fondled a broken hand, a brown dog roamed from one body to another sniffing the fresh blood. Men, struck in full stride, still appeared to be straining forward. Green flies were already buzzing in shimmering swarms.

"Human manure," Farel thought. "Our work. To justify this, the harvest must be immense."

Every instant he feared to see Makam Tiaba's corpse. The cold rage of the former non-com. would have led him to risk his life recklessly. When Makam Tiaba threw away his rank he revealed his real worth, the all powerful sense of duty. The stretcher bearers named some of the victims as they passed. They evidenced no sorrow, rather a speculative, philosophical wonder that these others and not they had gone.

"See Seydou Mousa, there—his head is wide open."

"Kirena was hit in the belly. He curves his back and has both hands across his stomach."

"He looks as if he had eaten too much rice this morning."

One of the men turned to Farel.

"Many die, Lieutenant. By and by all *Tirailleurs* die."

"Not so," Farel replied. "Soon there will be no more fighting."

"No more fighting? What men do then?"

"Work."

The black did not insist, but it was plain that he and his comrades did not relish the prediction. A world without war, and existence without the supreme moments of danger was beyond their understanding.

At the breach, Farel overtook Sparbes, who, dismounted, walked through the débris.

"You can see where our men and the Tukuleurs came together," he declared. "The line of dead is as definite as the fringe of a wave on sand. If our humanitarians saw this we'd never get through listening to their yells. I notice they never shed tears over those of us who go under."

"Fortunately, they're not in the habit of frequenting battlefields. They'll come later, talk of equality—and install themselves as administrators. We kill, they rob."

"Here's Champdor!" Sparbes said with a ring in his voice.

Farel looked up.

Down the narrow street, Makam Tiaba appeared, leading a white horse by the bridle. On the horse was Champdor. He did not look up. At every stride of the horse his torso swayed. As the strange procession drew nearer Farel perceived that the front of his uniform was soaked red. His hands hung limply. A bright object protruded behind his head.

"He is badly hurt," Sparbes said.

Beside the stretcher, Tiaba halted. He was bloody from head to foot, his cheek was torn open. Farel looked into Champdor's face. The features were calm, the eyes closed. A thin stream of blood streaked his chin, dripping from the corner of his lips, as blood had seeped from Mourdia's lips.

"Dead," Farel said, dazed.

"Dead," agreed Tiaba. "He was hit by several bullets in the body when he leaped into the breach from the wall. I knew he was dying. I wanted to send him back. He said he would not go. He called for his horse. I and some others pushed him into the saddle and tied him as he said to do. Knowing that he would soon die, knowing what he wished, I ran his sword inside his tunic to hold him up. Then he said, 'Lead the horse, Tiaba.' I was afraid you would blame me, but he said again, 'Lead the horse, Tiaba. They want a white man. I am a white man.' I then understood why he wished to go on, and I led him forward. Before the *diomfoutou*, the auxiliaries had become afraid. When they saw him, they thought he was alive, and fought——"

"Take him back, Makam Tiaba."

The sub-lieutenant tugged at the bridle. "He was a good white man," he concluded.

Native instinct, unerring touch-stone—Makam Tiaba had long ago sensed the gold in the base metal.

AGAIN Farel was in the Kayes Hospital. Again, the commander in chief was at his bedside. Another like Combeau. The same ruthlessness in action, the same kindness to a defeated enemy. The French did not shape the Sudan, the Sudan shaped Frenchmen.

"There was something between Champdor and yourself, Farel—" Then as Farel did not speak. "I will not ask you to say anything against him. But I may inform you that Captain Champdor, on his way through Kayes, left the usual papers to be sent to his relatives should he die. One of the envelopes was addressed to me. You probably know what it contained."

"I think I do."

"You are young, can easily make up for lost time—" the commander smiled—"with the assistance of a repentant staff. I have discreetly informed your comrades of the truth. As is but right, your promotion will be hastened. That's about all."

Farel did not immediately speak.

"It seems a pity, Colonel," he volunteered at last, "that death should be needed to place the seal of sincerity on remorse and atonement. It's a hard code."

"For us, death should mean nothing. The manner of meeting death is the test. Champdor stood it well. His death served France more than his life. It is sad to pass out of the picture, but, sooner or later, men must die."

"HOW'S SHE LOGGIN'?"

by Charles Nicholls Webb

FRANK LA DUE and Johnny Kidd,
Sometimes for six months or more,
Wouldn't meet, and when they did,
Looked like they was kinda sore;
Neither not so very glad
For to see the other lad.
Grinnin' in a sheepish' way,
Most you'd ever hear 'em say
Would be: "How's she loggin', John?"
"Bully, how you gettin' on?"

Raised together was them two,
Somewheres up 'round Tamarack.
Both was quiet—I tell you—
Quiet, but stood back to back
More'n once when hell bust loose
In the dance hall at Burnt Spruce;
When them bohunks, full of gin,
'Lowed they'd try to buck agin
Frank and Jack who stood and grinned—
When the gang was tamed and thinned.

When the War broke out they went—
Didn't have to, neither one—
Diff'rent outfits; both was sent
To the front to strafe the Hun.
Chunk of shrapnel nipped La Due;
Kidd got gassed but both pulled through;
Woke up facin' crost a bed
In a horspital. One said—
"Well, Frank, how you gettin' on?"
"Bully, how's she loggin', John?"

Terlegaphy and The Bronc

by Alan LeMay

Author of "Mustang Breed," "The Three Missing Men," etc.

"FODDER" WILLIAMS, wandering bronc peeler, had hung his rope on a close-coupled cayuse in the Triangle R breaking corral; he had snubbed the horse's head short to a post and put on the saddle blanket. The horse had stamped on his foot. Fodder, whose temper was short, had responded with an oath that smoked, and grabbed the quirt that dangled from his wrist, when——

Whack! A hard old fist caught Fodder Williams back of the ear. It was a stinging blow, probably accompanied, in Fodder's head, by a great flash of light and the sound of distant thunder. The cowboy took three gigantic, hasty steps, such as any man takes when caught off his balance, and sprawled in the spring mud. He was up instantly and whirled with ready fists.

"Now listen," said "Whiskers" Beck, backing away with his hands above his head. "Wait a minute! I didn't go fer to cause no bother! Now listen!"

To be walloped behind the ear without notice is a surprize to most. But to whirl, with battle in your eye, to find a white-bearded attacker backing away with his hands up, and declaring that he "didn't mean nothin' by it"—that is astonishing. Fodder paused with fist drawn back for a shattering haymaker, and his mouth dropped open.

"Leave me explain," urged Whiskers. "Hold on now!"

Fodder recovered himself and started forward.

"Why you —— old——"

Whiskers lowered his hands and ruefully braced himself to meet the attack. It didn't come. A restraining noose dropped over Fodder's shoulders and jerked his elbows against his sides.

"Now, here!" interposed "Whack-Ear" Bates, approaching hand over hand along the rope. "Mebbe you think you're havin' a scrap with Whiskers, but sech ain't the case! Anyways, not till I'm topped off. 'Smatter with you?"

Fodder Williams was a man extremely willing with his fists. But he was only a medium-sized man, and Whack-Ear's lean two hundred pounds towered over him like a coyote over a prairie dog. Fodder considered a moment as he shook loose the relaxed rope, and his wrath cooled somewhat.

"This bush-faced pelican went to work an' pasted me with a rock!" he declared.

"I done no sech thing," protested Whiskers. "I jest kinda patted him with the flat o' my hand to 'tract his attention."

"Why you ——" began Fodder again, showing signs of action.

At this point old Ben Rutherford, the "Old Man," stepped into the conference.

"Whup! Pull up!" he put in. "Mostly my boys takes care o' thmselves; but Whiskers is only about a hundred years old, an' a likely lad, and I don't want him all busted in pieces. You leave him be!"

"I guess I'm able tuh—" began Whiskers Beck.

Fodder slammed his five-pound hat against the ground.

"You standin' there an' tellin' me I got to let every —— in the outfit knock me down all he wants to?"

"Leave me explain," said Whiskers. "Didn't mean to cause no bother. But that bronc there's jest exactly the hoss I been lookin' fer, fer a sartin partic'lar use. It took more'n three years tuh make that hoss, an' I don't perpose to have him spoiled by bein' hit with no quirt. So when Fodder hauls off at him, I had to take action sudden."

"Lemme get this straight," said the Old Man, shoving his broad hat to the back of his head. "You wallops this feller?"

"Yep."

"To stop him hittin' the *hoss?*"

"Yep!"

Three mouths dropped open as the men stared at Whiskers. A blank expression erased all signs of intelligence from the Old Man's craggy face. He and Whack-Ear looked at each other dumbfounded.

"Well," said Old Man Rutherford finally, "it's a plumb mystery to me. But, Williams, you'll have to leave Whiskers be, that's flat. Either you calls off this deal or you kin move on!"

Fodder computed hastily. He knew that if he quit the outfit the story would go out that he had been whipped and driven off by a man old enough to be his great-grandfather. Such a story would never do for his future reputation on the range. He stalled for time.

"Look at them chaps!" he demanded.

He pointed to the dirt that smeared the silky unclipped goat hair adorning his bowed legs.

"Jest look!"

"Leave me have that cayuse, an' I'll clean them chaps up fine," offered Whiskers.

"How 'bout the hat?" pursued Fodder, picking the article up from where he had thrown it himself.

"All right—hat too," conceded Whiskers.

"Take it or leave it lie," said Old Man Rutherford.

"I'll call quits," Fodder decided.

Whiskers heaved a sigh of relief.

"Come on, hoss. Le's you an' me go somewheres where it's quiet."

The three stared after him without comprehension as he led the dancing cayuse away.

"HOW yuh comin' with the specially eddicated bronc, Whiskers?"

Four days had gone by since Whiskers had knocked Fodder sprawling; and Whack-Ear thought the subject should now be cool enough for mess-shack handling.

"Fair," Whiskers reported. "Kettled somethin' terr'ble yestidday. Didn't know but what I'd bit off more'n I should, me bein' stiffer than once. That part's finished, though. Won't do no more than crow-hop to get warm from now on, I figger."

"I wouldn't give two cents for a horse that bucked only jest the once," said "Dixie" Kane. "Not one cent, even. Gimme a horse with sperrit, that fights back plenty!"

"This'n's different," said Whiskers through a mouthful of hot potatoes.

"Get a real sperrited horse," said "Dixie" Kane. "Then get on an' ride—that's my way."

Whiskers gestured with his fork, gulped and unlimbered into speech.

"So I notice," he replied. "An' you never made a top hoss, neither. Some o' you rannies think if you can climb on an' stay on the top side that you know the whole works. Nossir. Trouble with you, yer ridin' hasn't been backed up by no readin'."

"Readin'?" repeated "Doughfoot" Wilson, startled into unaccustomed speech. "What the ——!"

"Squirty" Wallace snickered and choked. Whiskers went on unperturbed.

"Betcha yuh never even heard about terlegaphy," he declared.

"Sure I did," Dixie Kane contended hotly. "You sends somethin' through a wire, an' it comes out the other end in the shape o' rattles an' clicks."

"This here I got hold of is a new kind," said Whiskers. "I got it out of a newspaper. You sends a message from one brain to another, without wires nor nothin', jest by concentratin' the human eye. Hosses catches on special easy, bein' they use it theirself all the time.

"Now this here little hoss, Ten Spot, he's jest the hoss for that. I'm goin' to fix him so I kin operate him by terlegaphy, not hollerin' at him nor nothin'. Trouble with most cayuses is they're hard in the head, peetrified yuh might say. Ten Spot's different. What I think goes from my eye to his temper'ment, like a magnet, an' there takes effect. Ten Spot, he's the right kind—

hard in the muscle, but not in the head."

"Kind o' soft in the bean, huh?" said Whack-Ear. "Well, there's others."

"Mebbe," said Whiskers, wiping his brush-like beard with his sleeve. "Wait a while, an' we'll see."

He got up and strolled out, fumbling for his makings. Just around the corner of the mess shack he brought them to light, and paused to roll a cigaret. He could hear the voices within.

"He's goin' to work an' spoilin' a good fast horse," said Dixie Kane. "When a horse don't fight back right, why, somethin's wrong either in horse or handlin'."

"He makes me sick," said Fodder's voice. "If, now, jest f'r instance, somebody would take an' sling their hat down in front o' that bronc, jest as he was ridin' him out—I wonder now if what follered wouldn't set 'em both into righter ways o' thinkin'!"

"Yep," said Whack-Ear. "On'y, anybody won't, or hadn't better."

"Well, there's a whole —— of a lot of wont's around this outfit," answered Fodder. "That's all I got to say!"

Whiskers walked to the bunk house and got his old six-shooter out of his bed roll; and when Fodder came up, Whiskers was sitting on a bench outside, cleaning the gun with care.

"What's all that for?" Fodder asked casually.

Whiskers looked at him with a slow, baleful gaze.

"Well," he said, "if everythin' goes jest to suit me, I'm goin' to shoot a yalla praira dog someday."

He got up, stuck the iron in its open holster, hooked the slit thong over the hammer and strolled off toward the corrals.

Fodder stared after him.

"Crazy loco," he told himself, "an' li'ble to go hurtin' somebody, like as not. Somethin' oughter be done 'bout that." He scratched his head. "Mebbe, too, I'm the one that oughter do it, come a chance!"

WHISKERS began Ten Spot's education when the first green grass was showing at the edge of the melting snow. For four weeks Fodder Williams, Dixie Kane and Charley Decatur worked in the breaking corral, peeling the raw broncs that had been hazed in with the range stock. The winter riders, together with half-a-dozen punchers who had wintered in town and several new hands, amused themselves topping off the strings of saddle stock that were cut to them. And Whiskers worked chiefly on Ten Spot.

By the time that the wagons pulled out for the spring round-up Whiskers was more confident than ever that Ten Spot was the makin's of probably the best—and certainly the most terlegaphic—cow horse in three *remudas*.

From time to time Whiskers would demonstrate to skeptics how terlegaphy worked in practise. He would walk out to the edge of the *remuda*, and pick a point possibly fifty yards from Ten Spot. Then, without saying a word, he would fold his arms and subject Ten Spot to a piercing glare. The ragging of the other punchers was somewhat diminished by the fact that Ten Spot actually came. Doughfoot Wilson, at least, was sufficiently impressed to try it himself; but as nothing happened, he gave it up and returned to "talkin' down a rope."

Most, however, thought they perceived a connection between Whiskers' terlegaphy and Ten Spot's taste for fresh bread, and said so. Nevertheless the most unimpressed were willing to admit that Whiskers' tutelage was developing Ten Spot into a willing and brainy little cow horse.

Spring breezed past, and the early round-up was over. Riders rode out singly, or in little groups of twos and threes, to hunt out the scattered wild cattle that the round-up had missed, with a view to decorating calf hides with brands. These were often gone many weeks at a time, living off the country when their scant rations were exhausted. And so the summer ran its course.

Then, as the first frosts began to turn the prairie wool the color of dusty leather, the cook once more yelled at his six-horse team, and the chuck wagon rolled. Charley Decatur, the pilot, rode in the lead, and the bed wagon and the wood wagon swung in behind. Following these came the *remuda*—the herd of saddle stock; and sixteen or seventeen punchers rode where they pleased. The fall works were on.

Ten Spot was now rounding into a mighty neat little cow horse, one that showed an intelligent interest in his work. Whiskers was working harder than ever to make Ten Spot strictly telegraphic, and seemed to be having some success.

The test of Whiskers' terlegaphy theory came in the fall round-up's third week.

WHISKERS had in mind several fine points in the education of Ten Spot, which he conceived could be best taught out of sight and sound of the herd. He wanted to teach him, for instance, the uncommon knack of driving two or three steers in a constant direction without frequent correction by his rider. He wanted him to know the vagaries of a lone steer on the open plain, as differing from those of a steer near a herd; and other points leading to the consummation of his ideal.

"Whack-Ear," said Whiskers to the straw boss, "reckon if I'd ride back north'ard a ways I might pick up quite a little bunch o' stray critters."

"Take a look," said Whack-Ear.

Whiskers Beck, therefore, tied three days' very scant rations and a couple of blankets to his saddle; and without further ado rode north.

He swung in a wide circle, so planning that when his chuck gave out he would be not more than nine hours easy ride from the main herd. Hunting was for some reason not so good as he had expected. On the morning of the fourth day he was not more than four hours' jog from the herd, driving only two hobbled steers. A little after midday he jumped a third steer.

The animal, evidently a wise old-timer, had been lying low in a bunch of brush, and Ten Spot was almost upon the steer before it broke. The horse leaped in pursuit, overtaking the steer in easy bounds. Whiskers tossed his rope over the long horns and jerked it taut. Ten Spot was fast catching on to this part of the job. The buckskin pony swung round the hind quarters of the steer to the far side and raced ahead. The steer, his hind legs jerked from under him, crashed to the ground in a cloud of dust.

Ten spot stopped and leaned on the rope. Whiskers was already off, running to the steer. Quickly the old puncher hog-tied one foreleg to the two hind feet. Then he calmly sat on the steer's carcass and rolled a cigaret.

"Real good, Ten Spot., Make a hoss yet, if'n you keep tryin'."

Leisurely he smoked the cigaret and rested, watching with pleasure the patience with which Ten Spot stood to the rope. Presently he tossed away the fag, loosed the lariat, coiled it and hung it on the saddle. Next he tied the steer's off hind foot to its near fore with a short piece of rope.

Whiskers remembered afterward that he had looked at that bit of rope with suspicion. It was pretty old, cut from a worn-out lariat. But——

"If'n it busts, we got more," said Whiskers.

Now he passed the steer's tail between its hind legs, took a firm grip with one hand, and with the other loosed the "piggin' string."

Twelve hundred pounds of beef struggled to rise. Whiskers hung on to the tail, pulling upward, and the steer stayed down. In few moments the big black beast gave it up.

"Now, c'mere," said Whiskers to Ten Spot. Still dimly trying to please, Ten Spot came three steps closer.

"Little more," demanded Whiskers. Ten Spot advanced one step.

"More yet!"

Ten Spot lowered his head and whuffed at the steer with an air of distrust; then advanced a very scant foot.

"Oh, all right," said Whiskers. "Guess the old man can make it from here."

Whiskers suddenly released the steer's tail and bolted for his saddle. He saw Ten Spot shuffle nervously, and knew the big black critter was surging to its feet. In that instant a dog hole caved under Whiskers' foot and he plunged headlong, almost against his horse's cannon-bone. Ten Spot shied in a sidelong leap that took him yards beyond Whiskers' reach. The old man heard the snap of the breaking hobble, and a furious thud of hoofs.

Instantly Whiskers snatched his iron from its open holster, cocked the pistol with the same motion that flicked the slit thong off the hammer, rolled over on his elbow, threw up the barrel—all in less than a second—pulled the trigger.

A dull click responded; then a second, as he pulled again. Flying hoofs, red eyes, a tremendous sweep of horns were almost upon him. Whiskers rolled like a flash toward the charging beast. Horns and hoofs passed over.

The man twisted head and shoulders and with elbow resting on the ground pulled the trigger four times as the steer whirled and returned to the charge. Not one shot answered. A terrible sickening sensation gripped the old man's vitals, the sensation of a weaponless man facing imminent death. As the hammer clicked harmlessly upon the last chamber Whiskers threw out the cylinder and snapped the ejector. Six empty shells fell into the dust. His left hand shot to a chap pocket. Once more that great horned head flashed above him. He rolled toward the trampling hoofs. The fore hoofs passed over. One sharp, iron-hard hind hoof spurned his left knee with a vicious grind.

In a deep corner of the pocket Whiskers' fingers found a cartridge. With hand shaking a little with haste, he popped the cartridge into the chamber, snapped the cylinder into place. The steer was charging again. This time the gun spoke with a heavy crash, and the steer went down.

"Well, goshamighty," said Whiskers peevishly, "It's pretty —— near time!"

He sat up and examined his numbed knee ill-humoredly. The pain was just beginning to course into it with the throbbing return of the blood. A warm trickle along his thigh told him that the knee was beginning to bleed. He decided to take off his weather-stiffened chap and see if a bandage would help. With his hands he gingerly bent the leg.

"Wowie! Hold on, cowboy!" he addressed himself. "We jest better let well enough be. Me, I'm goin' home!"

He tried to get to his feet. It was no use; it simply couldn't be done. Now, if ever, was the time to send a few urgent mental messages to his horse. He rested painfully on his elbow and concentrated mind and eye on Ten Spot.

Ten Spot had discreetly retired from the scene of action, and was now grazing a hundred yards away. Whiskers fixed him with a sincere glare, and sent him a mental telegram that fairly shot sparks. Nothing happened. Perhaps, after all, terlegaphy was unable to carry over so great distances. When several minutes of this brought no more favorable results, Whiskers tried other resources.

He whistled sharply to attract the pony's attention. Ten Spot looked up and favored Whiskers with a long, deliberate stare. Then he returned to his grass.

"Hey there!" shouted Whiskers. "You know what I mean! Come over here! Mind, now!"

No sign of intelligence from Ten Spot.

The old man began to swear. A thin stream of scorching invective trailed across the prairie to Ten Spot. The horse grazed steadily, unimpressed.

Whiskers changed his tactics.

"Beans, Ten Spot!" he called persuasively. "Openin' up a nice, juicy can o' beans! Come an' get 'em! Don't you want beans?"

Ten Spot gave no sign that he had heard. Possibly he preferred tangible grass to imaginary canned goods. In any case he stayed where he was.

Terlegaphy and the human voice alike failed to dent Ten Spot's brazen indifference. He had evidently discovered that he didn't have to obey.

When a horse won't come to you, it is necessary to go to the horse. Whiskers' injured knee was now paining him badly. His left foot was beginning to swell, and with great difficulty he worked off the loose boot with the toe of the other. Then, dragging the boot in one hand, he began to crawl toward the horse.

SLOWLY, painfully, he pulled himself across the level ground. The sock dragged off of the bootless foot; a little trickle of blood appeared on the ankle, and began to dot his trail with little dark spots. Every inch of the way was torture; but inch by inch, foot by foot he somehow covered the ground. From time to time Ten Spot moved forward in his grazing, undoing in a moment five minutes of agonizing toil.

Whiskers knew that the nearer he approached Ten Spot without attracting the animal's attention the surer was his chance of success. He paused and rested ten yards from the mount; then forced himself to go on. Five yards; Ten Spot was headed the other way. Just a little farther, he told himself. Two yards more.

"C'mere, Ten Spot!"

His voice sounded strange, a hoarse, raucous croak.

Ten Spot started, spun about and gazed at the grotesque, sprawling figure of the man. Perhaps a faint scent of blood came to his nostrils. He whuffed, shook his head, and started away at a lope. One forefoot stepped on the trailing reins, jerking down his head and the horse somersaulted. Badly scared, the pony scrambled to his feet and went into a mad fit of bucking as he plunged away. Then he straightened out and ran.

Ten Spot was half a mile away when he

began to graze again. Whiskers' face became gray and set as he stared at the distant horse. Without even an oath the old man gritted his teeth and started the long drag in pursuit.

The pain in his leg was now almost unbearable, running in hot surges well up into his back. The blood still trickled slowly, draining his strength; it left little, blackening dots in the dust of the plain. Once he collapsed face down, his laboring breath drawing little particles of sand between his dry lips; and when he tried to spit it out he could not.

Yet he went on and on, ever so slowly covering the ground, while the hours passed and the sun went down; and finally, somehow, three-quarters of a mile from the carcass of the steer, he found himself once more one hundred yards from his horse. Whiskers regarded with dull eyes the animal that meant life, hope, the only chance he had to avoid a slow death on the plain.

The bleeding had stopped at last, but he was weak. He had not eaten since sun-up, and this, with the loss of blood, left him faint. His head pounded and swam, and gradually the prairie floor assumed a slow, hardly perceptible revolving motion that told him he had not much farther to go.

The sun was setting now behind the far Wind River Mountains, spreading over the softening sky a glory of wine purple and Aztec gold that Whiskers did not see. And with the sunset there came a far-off sound that brought the cold sweat to the old man's brow.

It began in a low, moaning thunder, the deep-lunged bass of a restless bull. It increased in volume till the great voice broke into bleating soprano bellows. No personality in the herd is so subject to malevolent whim as the bull. He can be as docile and timorous as any calf; or, sometimes, he can work himself up to prowl and stamp half the night, with enraged roars, over half a tin-cupful of spilled blood.

Not a fearsome sound, this bellowing, to a man in the saddle or by a fire; but an ominous thing to a crippled man alone on the plain, lying at the end of a dotted trail of blood. Slowly Whiskers twisted his head and looked back the way he had come. He could see the cattle, perhaps a dozen of them, a low black blur three-quarters of a mile away. The bull he could not make out, but Whiskers knew that he was probably sniffing the blood of the fallen steer, and throwing dirt over his own back with pawing hoof.

Whiskers thrust a shaking hand into the pocket that had yielded the stray cartridge, in the desperate hope that another might be there. The pocket contained tobacco crumbs, lint—nothing more. Hastily the old man began searching the other pockets in his clothes.

"Good ——!" he whispered fervently. "Leave me have jest one! For ——'s sake be there! *Be* there!"

One was. Shakily Whiskers put the lone remaining cartridge into his gun. Then, with clamped teeth and features contorted with pain, he began the traversing of that last hundred yards to Ten Spot. Slowly, very slowly, he made his way, pausing frequently to husband strength. It was like the nightmare torture of a fever dream. Nearer, now, sounded the deep, moaning voice of the bull, *"Mwaaaw—Mmmwaaaaw!"* a malevolent, evil thing.

Twenty minutes passed. The clear light of evening was dimming into dusk. Whiskers looked back. He could make out the bull now, a great dark beast in advance of his little band of staring cattle. He could see him sniff and paw. Unquestionably he was following up that crooked, tortured trail. The man turned his eyes to Ten Spot, thirty yards away.

The horse had ceased to graze, and was half turned, staring back. Perhaps he was suspiciously regarding the huddled figure on the ground, perhaps looking at the approaching cattle beyond. On what the animal would do next depended Whiskers' chance for life.

The old man gaged the distance. Little use, the single cartridge, to kill the bull, if the other cattle followed in a trampling rush, or if Ten Spot once more cantered beyond his reach into the dusk. Whiskers made a brave decision. Drawing his revolver, he staked his life on a single flip of the cards.

He braced his elbows and aimed with both hands at the top of Ten Spot's neck. A graze shot could drop the horse, momentarily stunned. A fraction of an inch too high would miss; an equal margin too low would kill. Either error would mean the end.

His hands shook, and he dared not shoot. Three times he closed his eyes and lowered the gun to steady his trembling hands. On the fourth attempt he fired, and Ten Spot fell.

Scrambling, regardless now of pain, Whiskers clawed himself over the ground, any old way, desperately striving to reach the pony before he should rise, if, indeed, he were ever to rise again. He reached the fallen horse, dragged himself over Ten Spot's barrel and clutched the horn. A long moment passed, the horse motionless beneath him, not seeming to breathe.

"*Mwaaaaw—mmmwaaaw*!" said the voice of the bull, very close now, so close that when he stood and pawed, Whiskers could hear his hoof tear at the earth. The old man rested. He was through, his last card played. It was already decided whether he had lost—or won.

Ten Spot stirred, then rolled over on to his knees and shook his head. With a mighty effort Whiskers got his sound leg over the saddle. The pony heaved to his feet.

"It's me, Ten Spot!" Whiskers croaked. "It's me! Whoa an' easy, in the name o' ——!"

Somehow Whiskers recovered the trailing reins, and held the pony to a jogging walk until he could fumblingly strap himself to the saddle by buckling front and rear coat-straps through his belt. His released bed roll slid off, but he didn't care. He let the reins fall over the pommel and held on with both hands. With the battle over his game old nerve gave out, and the tears ran into his beard.

Ten Spot skirted the little herd of cattle, and headed south for the *remuda*, far away.

"Seems like—we're goin'—the wrong way," said Whiskers through the mists of pain.

He vainly tried to turn Ten Spot with his sound leg. Ten Spot went on.

DAWN, and a creeping grayness. Then two long streaks of burnt orange came into the buckwheat sky just above the eastern horizon, like long trailers of bright smoke.

At the main herd camp of the Triangle-R one of the motionless rolls of blanket emitted a preliminary whimper, growled and disgorged a tousled and bleary-eyed cook, fully dressed. This abused-looking husky stumbled over to the next roll of blanket and nudged it with his boot.

"Huh," he said to it in a tone of command. "'Snother day."

A puff-eyed puncher struggled to a sitting position and shook the next man.

With sleepy but effective movements the cook was starting his fire. The two wakened punchers pulled on their boots, picked up rope and rig and stumbled off toward the *remuda*, preparing to relieve the two motionless statues riding night herd a quarter of a mile away. An encouraging smell of bitter black coffee began to drift over the camp, a great mass of potatoes began to sizzle, the fire cracked and smoked. Blanket rolls stirred and subsided, the men inside groping for a last brief cat-nap before the ordeal of getting into action.

Whack-Ear, deep within his blankets, woke slowly, and painfully considered the necessity of rolling out. Some feeble fumbling cleared his head of the blankets; he yawned—and then listened. The soft plunk of walking hoofs sounded close, very close. In another moment a hoof moved into his range of vision and stopped. Whack-Ear twisted his neck, and with sleepy stupidity made his eye trace up a foreleg to the horse at the end of it. Suddenly Whack-Ear burst out of his blankets with a great yell.

"For ——'s sake, look here!"

All around him heads thrust sleepily out of blanket rolls. They stared for a fraction of a moment; then their owners, like Whack-Ear, turned out with sudden alacrity. A cluster of serious-faced punchers quickly formed about the invading horse.

In the saddle sat Whiskers, slumped over the pommel, gripping the horn with white, stiff hands. One leg, crooked and unnatural, stuck out stiffly away from the stirrup. He looked at them uncomprehendingly, with haggard, staring eyes that seemed set in black pits.

Whack-Ear and Squirty Wallace were fumbling at the straps that tied the old puncher to the saddle. Whiskers opened his mouth and tried to speak, but only a rasping noise came forth. Then, with a great effort, he wrenched out a question.

"Which o' you boys," he croaked, "took the cartridges—out o'—my iron?"

No one answered. Whiskers slowly moved his haggard blank eyes over the group of punchers.

"I know!" he rasped, fixing his gaze upon Fodder Williams. "That's the one!"

He let go the horn, and stretched a stiff, shaking claw in Fodder's direction.

"You — yalla — coyote — I'll fix — your dirty works."

Whiskers gripped the pommel and gamely tried to swing himself out of the saddle. Then suddenly he collapsed into Whack-Ear's arms.

"If I was you, Fodder," said Whack-Ear presently. "I b'lieve I'd take my horse an' ride!"

And Fodder, having considered the matter from all angles, took his horse and rode.

"TERLEGAPHY?" said Whiskers a long time after to a not-too-cautious questioner. "Terlegaphy? 'Sall right, son, works real slick an' inflooential — sometimes. But when it ain't workin'—well, you best do like me. Send that or'nary, obstinate, wooden-headed crocodile some other sort o' message —one that'll be real pressin'!"

A MYSTERY MAN

by Eugene Cunningham

PIONEER Californians like to reminisce about the cosmopolitan citizenry of San Francisco in gold rush times. There were so many men of various nations and walks of life that queer characters were myriad. One must have been markedly different to attract attention in that heterogeneous gathering.

In '49 a man named William F. Hamilton was daily pointed out on the streets for his singular refinement of appearance and manner. Even in that day of long beards, red shirts and muddy boots, Hamilton managed to be amazingly dapper. Little was known of him, save that he was born in Jamaica and came to California from New York.

He remained in the city, no man knowing exactly what his occupation was. As San Francisco assumed the airs of older places and uncouthness waned, Hamilton put on a suit of the finest broadcloth of unimpeachable style and cut, snowy linen and a high silk hat shinier than any other seen on Montgomery Street.

It was his custom to promenade with dignity along Montgomery every pleasant afternoon, bowing formally to acquaintances, always attracting much attention because he seemed to type the perfect Chesterfield. He was a member of the Society of California Pioneers; many had seen him daily since '49; still his manner of living was a mystery.

The passing years seemed to touch all but Hamilton. Men knew that he must be growing very old, but he was an institution, seeming little more changeable than stone. But upon a sunny afternoon in 1862 he did not appear at his usual hour; the next day he was missing still, and the next. Then the papers printed brief notices of his death. Some one, more than ordinarily curious, had traced the usual course of the old elegant and finally reached the building from which he set out daily.

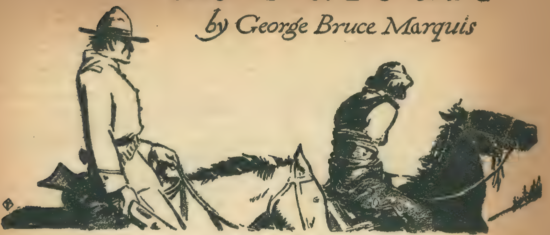
He lived in a warehouse loft near the juncture of California and Davis streets. Here he had lodged and worked for years, stuffing mattresses, pew and carriage cushions and the like. Each afternoon he had sallied out to comport himself as he felt a gentleman should.

Those who entered the bleak loft, littered with the material and tools of his trade, fancied almost that they looked upon a stranger, so hollow-cheeked, so aged, the meager figure on the pallet, its newly dyed black beard seeming artificial as stage make-up. An ingenious contrivance held the old man's coat and trousers in shape; his shining hat was in its box; a black wig, carefully combed, was on its block; his boots were treed and set with heels together in their corner.

All his life centered in those promenades among the fashionables. He was willing, it seemed, to labor in this gloomy loft if it gave him means to play the gentleman—and a thorough gentleman he was, by all reports—for a little while each day. He was dead and with him died his secret; if there were really any secret beyond a strong, set, independent character.

The Pursuit

by George Bruce Marquis



Author of "Eunamtuck, the Man," "The Lost Blue Bucket," etc.

AS EUNAMTUCK stooped to remove his coffee-pot a bullet came whirring out of the night, bit through the crown of his big black Stetson and buried itself in the tree behind him. Before the second shot, which came tripping hard upon the heels of the first, Eunamtuck had thrown himself sidewise out of the range of the firelight and, drawing his heavy revolver, fired three times at the tongue of flame that had licked at him viciously out of the darkness.

With a regretful glance at his coffee-pot, spewing its amber fluid into the edge of his camp-fire, Eunamtuck wriggled along the ground till he reached a clump of serviceberry bushes. Pushing his way into the protective shadows, he stood erect and, canting his head toward the quarter from which the attack had come, listened long and attentively. But he heard nothing, save the sounds common to the night in the mountains a hundred miles removed from every vestige of civilization.

Presently he sat down back against the bole of a tree, still alert and watchful. Two hours dragged by and at the end of that time, concluding that his assailants had withdrawn, he unrolled his blankets and was soon asleep.

The big Indian was a fit product of his time. He had been chief of the Tillayuma Indian Police for ten years, and in that time had won a unique position for himself, both in the estimation of the law abiding and the lawless. Uncorruptible and just, reputed the strongest and quickest man on the reservation, a peerless shot with either rifle or pistol, combining dauntless courage with the cunning and wariness of a fox, yet his big chest housed the simple heart of an unspoiled child. And he had, besides, an unfailing sense of humor that had stood him in good stead in many a crisis in his exciting career.

Three days before, he had left the Flat Dog Agency to investigate a reported killing of elk by a band of Indians on their summer hunt, and this night found him far back in the Blue Mountains and, as he had supposed, many miles from any human being. Yet out of the solitude had come the sudden attack, which but for a lucky move on his part would have been fatal.

With the first gray tinge of dawn Eunamtuck awoke. Determining to investigate the mysterious assault of the night before, he slipped out of his blankets and, picking up his rifle, set out.

Choosing a circuitous route, he warily approached the point from which the shots had been fired. In time he came upon it. A big pine lay across the trail and behind it he found the prints left in the soft mold where the two assailants had knelt down to sight their rifles over the log barricade. His camp was a good two hundred yards away, and the accuracy with which the shots had been fired in the uncertain light easily demonstrated that he was not dealing with novices in the use of firearms. Close behind the logs he picked up two empty shells,

"The Pursuit," copyright, 1925, by George Bruce Marquis.

which he proceeded to examine with care. The first was one used in a high-power modern hunting rifle of well-known make, while the second was an old-fashioned Winchester shell.

The log lay squarely across the trail, which sloped away quite sharply in the direction opposite from his camp. The two men had come and gone down this trail, their tracks being easily discernible in the thin layer of dust. As Eunamtuck cautiously followed their back trail, he studied the parallel tracks with care. From the exaggerated pigeon-toed style of one of the men Eunamtuck concluded that he was an Indian. The tracks of the other, however, puzzled Eunamtuck for a time. Unless the man was faking, he was crippled in the left foot, so much so that only the heel touched the ground. As Eunamtuck followed these irregular tracks his brows knitted in thought. He told himself that somewhere he had seen them before and then in a flash it came to him. He paused abruptly.

" 'Hip' Huddle!" he grunted. "Doubtless," he continued in the Nez Percés tongue, "the other is Takamsin."

Hip Huddle had been so named from his peculiar jerky style of walking, or as old "Bat" Jennison quaintly phrased it—

"He just naturally shoulders his hip every step he takes."

He was one of those disreputable whites often found around an Indian reservation, who make a precarious living through devious and unlawful ways. From the milder forms of iniquity, such as smuggling bad whisky on to the reservation and defrauding the unsophisticated Indian wards in a half-dozen different ways, he had by degrees graduated into a career of deeper crime, darkened by deeds of violence and bloodshed.

With him had been associated a Tillayuma Indian, Takamsin, a fit companion in his lawless deeds.

Six years before, the two men had suddenly disappeared from the reservation, but from time to time news had trickled back from the Flat Head Reservation in Montana, which indicated that they had merely shifted their field of operations. But if Eunamtuck's inference was correct, the two had returned. And that return had been signalized by his attempted murder.

Fully aware of the desperate character of the two men, Eunamtuck redoubled his caution, for he had no mind to run head-on into an ambuscade. As it proved in the end, his caution at this time was so much wasted effort, for presently he came upon their night's camp.

The dead ashes of their fire were ample proof that it had been out for hours, and Eunamtuck concluded that they had in all probability abandoned it soon after their unsuccessful attempt to kill him. Everything indicated that the camp had been deserted in a panic, for he found two or three small articles which had escaped them in their haste. Only one thing interested him, however, a badly crumpled twenty-dollar bill.

Painstakingly Eunamtuck smoothed it out. He could read after a fashion, and he finally made out that it was a note on the First National Bank of Tekoa, a town lying just beyond the limits of the Tillayuma Reservation, some four miles distant from the agency at Flat Dog. Now Eunamtuck's sense of smell was as keen as a hound's, and applying the bank note to his big, hooked nose, he sniffed at it a moment, then threw up his head with a chuckle.

"Injun," he declared.

FOR him the identity of the pair was now settled beyond a shadow of doubt. He was dealing again with Hip Huddle and Takamsin. Pausing only long enough to make sure of the direction of their flight, he returned to his own camp, ate breakfast and, saddling his horse, set out in pursuit of the two outlaws. He knew that they had a lead of several hours, for he reasoned that they had in all likelihood slipped away as soon as the moon had come up, probably about twelve o'clock.

The trail paralleled in rough fashion the south bank of the Tillayuma River, and now, giving the pinto his head, the Indian divided his attention equally between watching the tracks left by the two horses and keeping a sharp lookout ahead for the outlaws. When the signs indicated that the two had pushed their horses into a gallop, he did the same but never for a moment did he relax his vigilance.

He was thoroughly versed in the art of reading signs and could tell with approximate certainty the age of a trail. Conning these things over as he rode hunched over his saddle, eyes glued to the trail, he concluded that they were three or four hours in the lead at the least.

They seemed to hold the lead all through the afternoon and well toward evening. And then something happened that gave him cause to reflect.

The trail at this particular point ran up quite sharply over a tongue of rubble that had washed down through a little gully to the very bank of the river. The obstruction was not high, twenty feet possibly, but the ascent was so sharp that it would be impossible to see a dozen feet of the trail ahead once he was on the ascent.

Eunamtuck brought his pony to a halt and considered the situation. The one thing that threatened the greatest danger to him was to run head-on into an ambuscade, and this spot certainly afforded a perfect setting for such an enterprise on the part of the outlaws.

Mentally exchanging places with the two, Eunamtuck reasoned that they were perfectly certain that he would pursue them. With this established it was only a step to the conclusion that they would try to elude him or, failing in that, would undertake to kill him. What more natural for them than to lead him to think they were miles away, when in fact they were lying by the trail watching patiently for him to ride into a trap?

Eunamtuck, the wiliest of men, decided to investigate first. Riding back a few yards, he turned his pony aside behind a clump of alder and, dismounting, returned, rifle in hand, toward the point that had attracted his attention. As he approached the foot of the slide, his sharp eyes glimpsed something that certainly justified his caution.

A big rattler was leisurely drawing his stubby body across the highest point in the trail, when suddenly he stopped and throwing himself into a great coil, began to send out his blood-chilling warning. And the malevolent lidless eyes of the snake were fixed on some object on the other reach of the trail and invisible to the Indian.

Without for a moment shifting his gaze from the animated danger signal, perched on the arch of the trail, Eunamtuck backed stealthily behind a great fir tree, rifle outthrust and ready for instant use. How long the big rattler continued to send out his challenge Eunamtuck did not know, but presently the whirring gradually ceased, slowly the huge coils relaxed and the snake crawled on across the trail and disappeared in the underbrush.

Cautiously Eunamtuck negotiated the sharp ascent, crossed the divide and within a dozen yards was in full possession of the secret of the rattler's warning. Behind a rock at the side of the trail the thick grass had been crushed flat. And so recently, too, that even while he examined the spot the blades were straightening up in jerky fashion, showing that the place had been deserted within the last few minutes at the longest.

For a moment he wondered that he had heard not a sound as the two men had slipped away from the shelter of the rock, but the briefest of inspections of the grass, ankle high, which bordered the trail explained the mystery.

Then as he listened, the rapid drumming of horses' hoofs drifted to him from somewhere up the trail, and he knew that the outlaws were again in flight. Returning to his pony, he resumed the pursuit.

NIGHT came quickly, and as the darkness settled down like a heavy blanket over the deep cañon he drew aside from the trail, and made camp. He felt certain that Huddle and his companion were near, and he did not propose to furnish them with a target for rifle practise that night.

He staked out his horse, ate his supper of crackers and dried beef and, unrolling his blankets, lay down close to the trail. Well toward morning he awoke. A moon in the last quarter was just showing itself above the cañon rim, and its feeble light illuminated vaguely a considerable stretch of the trail ahead of him.

A blurred shapeless object showed at the farther end of the trail, an object that moved, but without sound. A moment's observation and he had solved it. The two outlaws on foot and leading their horses were trying to escape by the back trail. Another second, and, raising his rifle, he fired twice just over the heads of their horses. The sudden flashes of his gun, added to the whine of the bullets, threw a panic into the two horses.

Snorting with fear, they whirled about, dragging the lead-ropes through the outlaws' fingers, and went crashing up the back trail. With sudden agility the two outlaws dropped to the ground and laced the elusive darkness with a stream of bullets.

Eunamtuck, lying prone in the grass a dozen yards from the spot that had witnessed his attack, chuckled to himself as he watched their futile efforts to locate him. He did not fire again. Presently the two outlaws gave it up and, drawing back in the shadows, set off in the wake of their runaway horses.

As far as Eunamtuck was concerned he had no intention of shooting one of the men, unless absolute necessity forced him. Surely and steadily he was driving them into a cul-de-sac from which they could not escape. They were nearing the headwaters of the Tillayuma and in its pinched-in cañon they would be effectually trapped, for at its upper end the Tillayuma made a wild plunge from a sheer wall of basalt down into a narrow gorge, flanked on both sides by unscalable cliffs. The only way out was along a narrow shelf-like trail perched high above the river. And Eunamtuck was on the open end of that trail.

The next morning Eunamtuck resumed his tireless pursuit. The first few hours were but replicas of those of the preceding day, but along toward noon another diversion occurred.

The trail here opened out into a meadow just as if two huge bows had been placed together, string to string, only the bows were constructed of close-set trees backed by cliffs. The meadow was possibly three hundred yards across at its widest point, and the trail of the two horses led straight into it. Eunamtuck drew up his pony and studied the situation with care.

The trees and bushes made it impossible of approach undetected, except on foot. Not a sound was to be heard as he sat his horse, save the gentle soughing of the wind in the pine trees. It was too peaceful, too idealistic, and the big Indian shook his head at the thought of riding across the open prairie.

He turned his pony around and rode back along the trail for a short distance. Then he dismounted and, taking his rifle, pushed into the thicket and began to work his way through the tangle of trees and bushes toward the upper end of the tiny meadow. Moving with the stealth of a cat, in time he approached the point where he suspected that the outlaws might be concealed. The trees grew more sparsely here, and at the very edge where the meadow began was a fringe of buck-brush. Eunamtuck dropped to his knees and crawled warily out to this hedgelike screen.

Hardly had he reached its shelter when a crow, meditating high above in a dead cottonwood tree, spied him. Canting his head sidewise the bird studied the intruder with a beady eye, voted him lacking in confidence and, rising leisurely from his perch, gave vent to his disapproval in his raucous fashion. Inwardly cursing the feathered detective, Eunamtuck crouched lower and waited for developments. They came with amazing celerity and amply demonstrated that other eyes were alert that day other than the crow's.

A mass of wild rosebushes, growing scarcely fifty yards away, began erupting bullets at that precise moment, their destination being the buck-brush which concealed but did not shelter the chief of the Tillayuma Police. Ripping through the tiny branches, the lead hail showered Eunamtuck with leaves and bits of twigs, but save clipping a half-circle neatly in the outer rim of his big Stetson, he escaped unscathed.

The attack closed as abruptly as it began, and in a dozen pulse-beats Eunamtuck heard the sound of galloping horses and knew that the outlaws were beating a frenzied retreat. He sat up and removing his hat looked at the rent just contributed to his already abused headpiece. A slow grin overspread his jovial face, as he laid the tip of a big brown finger in the crescent-like depression.

"Betta bitum yo' dan me, ol' hat," he mused aloud in his quaint way. "No hurtun yo'. *Hiyu* hurtum *me.* Yo' bet yo' my life."

He went back to his horse and continued the pursuit. The outlaws had gained a considerable lead, but it did not worry their pursuer. The time was rapidly approaching when they would be forced into a corner and Eunamtuck patiently waited for that time to come.

And other events were shaping themselves in his favor, for about two hours before sunset, as he rounded an obtruding shoulder of rock, he saw some distance ahead a horse standing beside the trail. His first thought was that it was a trick of some sort, but a second glance told him a very different story.

Grown tender-footed from the unaccustomed traveling on mountain trails, the horse had stumbled and broken a foreleg, about half-way between the knee and foot. He was a magnificent black, and as he stood there on three legs, with the broken limb dangling uselessly, the heart of the big Indian went out to him in his helplessness.

Dismounting, he approached the abandoned saddle horse, calling to him softly in his way. The injured animal did not move, even when Eunamtuck reached out and stroked his forehead. Now a crippled horse is helpless enough under any circumstances, but his end in this wild region, where bears and panthers abounded, would be only a matter of hours. Yet Eunamtuck did reluctantly the thing that the outlaws should have done, if they had had a grain of mercy for their faithful ally. Drawing his heavy revolver, he put the horse out of his misery. As he stood looking down at the battered feet of the dead horse, he turned to his own wise little pony, and after his fashion addressed him.

"Chawenam," he declared, "thy hoofs of iron were made for trails like these."

Again his eyes wandered back to the other horse, and suddenly a novel idea occurred to him. Acting upon it, he drew his sheath knife and kneeling down quickly cut away the wavy black mane, rolled it into a bundle and stowed it away in his pack. This done, he swung lithely into his saddle and set out once more in the wake of the outlaws.

THE outlaws were in a desperate plight, for with but one horse between them and Hip Huddle a cripple any chance they had had to escape was now diminished by a good deal more than half. Besides, another day would bring them to the end of the trail where progress ahead was absolutely barred.

The tracks proved that Huddle was riding now, with Takamsin trailing behind, and it was equally evident to Eunamtuck that he was rapidly closing the gap between them. When night settled down in the black gorge, he felt that the pair were very near.

As on the previous night, Eunamtuck camped near the trail. Before him was a dense growth of trees and bushes, possibly a couple of acres in extent, which, he had no doubt, sheltered the outlaws. Like him, they would build no fire, and to attempt to stalk them in the velvety darkness would be the work of a madman.

It was growing quite light when Eunamtuck awoke. Sitting up in his blankets, he stretched his mighty arms above his head, while every rippling muscle in his great back laughed with the joy of superb health. To-day the chase would end he told himself.

Then to his acute ears there came the sound of a muffled shot. Gaging its direction, he concluded that it came from the matted tangle of timber immediately before him. He got to his feet and, picking up his rifle, set out to investigate.

Progress through the heavy brush and timber was a slow matter, and the lingering shadows added to his difficulties. Besides, he proceeded with great caution, for the shot might well be a trick to lure him into their clutches. He had penetrated well toward the heart of the jumble of fallen logs and great standing trees, when he came upon a small open space, walled in completely on every side by a hedge of bushes. Quite on the farther side he made out the body of a man lying on his face, his head surrounded by an irregular blotch that glinted dark red in the feeble rays of light that straggled through the obstructing foliage.

Skirting the open space, Eunamtuck in another minute had solved the mystery of the lone shot. He turned over the dead outlaw, to find himself looking into the distorted face of Hip Huddle. The bullet that had killed him had been fired from behind and at so close a range that his hair had been badly burned by the exploding powder.

Allowing the dead outlaw to settle back gently on the grass, Eunamtuck stood erect, and at that moment to his alert ears there came the sound of a galloping horse. Takamsin was making a desperate effort to escape and along the upper river. The big Indian smiled grimly to himself as he thought of the emotions of the fleeing man when he found in the end that that avenue was blocked by solid rock walls.

Before he went back to his own camp Eunamtuck covered the murdered man with logs and brush, sufficient to keep prowling animals away for the time at least. He did not stop to eat, but, saddling his pony, once more took up the pursuit. So far there had been a semblance of a trail, but from this point on it vanished, completely. All that day was a succession of wild scrambles over numberless tongues of rock slides that had crept down from the heights above to the very lip of the tumbling river.

Not long before sunset Eunamtuck came upon the outlaw's remaining horse, standing with drooping head at the foot of a fan-shaped rockslide which the tender-footed horse had been unable to scale. So much the tracks left in the treacherous shale informed Eunamtuck. Without a moment's hesitation Eunamtuck leaped from his pony and, leaving him to keep company with the abandoned thoroughbred, scrambled up the rockslide to solid footing above. Before him stretched away a level, rock causeway, hemmed in between the cliffs on his left hand and the bank of the river on his right.

Less than half a mile away the causeway terminated abruptly at the falls of the Tillayuma, where that turbulent stream leaped down a full hundred feet over a barrier of basalt into a seething whirlpool below. The thunder of the falling water drummed in Eunamtuck's ears, as his eye swept the smooth unbroken course before him.

Two hundred yards away Takamsin was running desperately toward the falls, as if he still hoped to find some avenue of escape. But escape was impossible, and Eunamtuck chuckled to himself as he watched Takamsin sprinting madly for safety that did not exist. Now with a tireless, distance-devouring stride the big Indian leaped in pursuit. He gained with surprizing rapidity and when Takamsin reached the edge of the frothing whirlpool at the foot of the falls, Eunamtuck was less than a hundred yards behind him.

And now for the first time Takamsin seemed to realize that he was effectually trapped. He swept the smooth rock walls with a rapid glance, and then without hesitation leaped over the rim of the boiling caldron and disappeared. Eunamtuck halted abruptly, and, edging over to the brink of the sheer rock wall, watched the river for any signs of the outlaw. Presently Takamsin's big white hat came bobbing along on the frothing water, canted over drunkenly and sank beneath the surface.

At sight of this Eunamtuck shook his head and then as if dismissing the whole thing from his mind, turned about and slowly retraced his steps to the horses. Which perhaps after all was a fortunate thing for him to do, for Takamsin had not taken the wild plunge into the whirlpool, but instead had leaped down on to a narrow ledge, which a few feet below hung like a narrow shelf mortised to the blank rock wall. Doubling around its upper edge, he scrambled up quickly behind a shattered block of basalt which was perched on the very edge above the frothing bowl of the whirlpool. He now had a complete view of Eunamtuck as he stood watching the antics of Takamsin's hat as it drifted on the turbulent waters.

He lay there, eye glued to his rifle barrel, finger crooked round the trigger, yet so great was his fear of the redoubtable chief of police that Takamsin dared not fire at that distance. To miss from a rest at less than a hundred yards seemed impossible, yet while he debated the chances with himself, Eunamtuck ended the mental argument by turning away.

With some difficulty Eunamtuck managed finally to get the two horses up around the rock slide and in a few minutes had established his camp in a small grove of stunted black pine in full view of the falls and the Indian, watching there.

Behind the little grove was a tiny meadow, where he staked out the tired horses to riot in the lush grass. And now, for the first time in three days, he built a fire and cooked a meal. A competent eater at all times, the big Indian this time had fairly eclipsed his former gastronomic efforts, when with a sigh of complete satisfaction he stowed away the last scrap of his Gargantuan repast, loosed his belt and settled back to rest.

In the meantime Takamsin from his hiding place watched with greedy eyes the smoke curling up from Eunamtuck's fire, and the evening breeze seemed almost to carry the odor of the cooking food to his twitching nostrils. But Takamsin knew well the philosophy of patience and did not propose now to imperil his precariously won safety by a premature move.

His plan was simple. With Eunamtuck completely off his guard he proposed to stalk him under the cover of darkness, kill him with less compunction than he would have a wolf, repossess himself of his horse and make a leisurely and unhampered escape.

To do this last was sufficient reason in itself for the exercise now of great caution, but bulking huge above it even, was the certainty that he could glut his desire for revenge in no other adequate way. So while darkness settled down tardily over the river gorge, Takamsin watched the twinkling light of the camp-fire and waited.

THE camp-fire had dwindled to a mass of glowing embers when Takamsin paused on the outskirts of the little grove and from the shelter of a tree warily inspected the camp and its surroundings. The fire had been built in a tiny open spot, and its mild glow was yet sufficient to light up everything within a radius of a dozen feet with considerable distinctness.

Beyond the fire was a stunted pine tree, and hanging on the end of a broken limb was Eunamtuck's big black Stetson. At the foot of the tree, between it and the fire, Takamsin made out a form wrapped in Eunamtuck's blankets, and Takamsin grinned evilly as he caught sight of the mass of black hair just peeping out from under the gaudy blankets. It offered a mark impossible for him to miss at that distance.

But he would make assurance doubly sure, so, swinging a pack, not unlike those carried by Boy Scouts on hiking trips, noiselessly from his shoulders, he crept still nearer.

At a distance of not greater than ten yards he halted again and, raising his rifle, drew a bead on that thatch of hair sticking out from under the blankets. With deliberation he held it under his rifle in the manner of a gormand lingering over a dainty morsel. To kill the wily Eunamtuck under any circumstances would be sheer joy, but to do it with such ease was adding a hilarious climax to his elation.

Immediately at the shot the lower end of the blankets was thrown into violent commotion, observing which, Takamsin dropped his gun and, knife in hand, leaped eagerly across the intervening space adequately to finish the pleasant task.

But as he stooped over, with amazing suddenness something thudded across the back of his skull, dropping him senseless in his tracks.

Consciousness returned slowly to Takamsin, and the first sight that met his befuddled gaze was Eunamtuck, very much alive, smiling at him genially across the rejuvenated camp-fire. Scowling in a crooked, ugly way at this unpalatable discovery, Takamsin turned his attention to things at hand.

He was seated on the ground, his back against the tree at the edge of the camp-fire, and around his body and the tree were wound coil after coil of a rawhide lariat. Had he been confined in a strait-jacket he could not have been more helpless. And now to him was revealed the cunning manner in which Eunamtuck had ensnared him.

Lying just beyond the reach of Takamsin's tattooing heels was a section of log, half as big around as his body and about as long. Across its middle was still draped Eunamtuck's gaudy blankets, but both ends were exposed, and as he looked at it Takamsin ground his teeth in rage. To one end of the log was attached a rope, now slack and lying on the ground, its free end leading behind the tree to which he was now so securely anchored.

The sight of the other end of the log drove him simply mad with impotent rage, for around it was bound artfully the black mane which Eunamtuck had clipped from the outlaw's dead saddle horse!

Eunamtuck observed the silent tribute to his genius with pardonable elation. Picking up the rope, he jiggled the log so that he gave a poor imitation of a man kicking lustily.

"*Hiyu* kickum!" He grinned at the discomfited Takamsin. "*Hiyu* dead now," he added, as the log ceased its mad gyrations and came to rest. "Dat first tam yo' killum log?" he inquired whimsically.

Takamsin made no reply to this question and after a minute Eunamtuck continued:

"Dis afternoon me seeum yo' all a tam at falls. Me know yo' no jumpum in rivah. Yo' heap fraid do dat. But me no want to killum yo'. Me tink dis better way gettum yo'. Now yo' hang sure. Yo' bet yo' my life."

"That is as it may be," Takamsin said gutturally in Nez Percés, "but I am not in Tekoa and doubtless I will escape."

"Thou wilt not escape," Eunamtuck replied positively in the same tongue. "Think of one who has escaped from me and name him. There is no one."

"I will escape," Takamsin replied bravely, though in his evil heart he felt misgivings, for he knew that Eunamtuck's calm statement was the exact truth.

No prisoner had ever come to his freedom once the wily chief of police had had his powerful hands upon him. And yet, might not he, Takamsin, prove to be the one exception?

Leaving the morose outlaw to brood over his plight, Eunamtuck walked over to the spot where he had seen Takamsin drop his pack. In a moment he returned with it and laying it upon the ground in the full light of the crackling camp-fire, he unbuckled the heavy straps and threw back the canvas flap. Even he, stolid Indian that he was, emitted an ejaculation of astonishment, for the knapsack was literally jammed full with packages of banknotes!

Eunamtuck with some little awe lifted out one of the neat, flat packages and studied it with respect. The notes were new, and the denomination fifty dollars. Also he noted that they were bills of the first National Bank of Tekoa. With that discovery a new light was suddenly thrown upon the whole perplexing problem of the last three days.

He turned upon Takamsin.

"Yo' robbum bank Tekoa," he said accusingly. "Yo' t'ink me knowum yo' robbum. Yo' try to killum me for dat, hunh? Yo' killum Huddle so yo' gettum all dat monish, hunh? Takamsin yo' *hias cultus* mans."

To the flat accusation that he was a very bad man, the outlaw entered no denial, but instead his manner underwent a sudden change.

"Thirty thousand dollars is there," he said artfully. "Half of it will make you rich. Take it and let me go."

Eunamtuck raised his big hand threateningly and the trussed-up man shrank from the expected blow. But Eunamtuck did not strike him.

"I have said," he remarked dispassionately in the Nez Percés language, almost as if speaking to himself, "that you will hang. Therefore, I, Eunamtuck, must not kill you. Nevertheless, I can stop your wagging tongue with this," and he pointed significantly to his silk neck-handkerchief.

"Thou art a fool," Takamsin spat out.

Nevertheless he retired into a discreet silence, for to be gagged indefinitely offered no very alluring prospect.

Whether Eunamtuck slept or not Takamsin did not know of a certainty, but at any rate he found the other awake whenever he stole a furtive glance in his direction.

At daybreak they ate breakfast and were soon on their way. Always the watchful eye of the chief of police was on his prisoner, and, though Takamsin revolved ceaselessly numberless plans of escape, not the slightest opportunity presented itself. Near evening they halted at the spot where Takamsin had murdered Hip Huddle, and now under Eunamtuck's urging the reluctant Indian heaped above his victim stones and brush till the dead outlaw was effectually shielded from marauding animals.

On the fifth day, just past the noon hour, they rode into Tekoa, and Eunamtuck promptly delivered his prisoner to the sheriff. Shaking off that voluble officer, Eunamtuck took his leisurely way to the bank and entered it unobtrusively and passed on to where the president of the bank, John Kellough, sat, hunched up gloomily over some correspondence. The robbery, added to the death of two of his employees, had been a heavy blow to the banker, and now, as the big Indian's shadow fell across his desk, he looked up with some show of annoyance.

"Want to see me, Eunamtuck?" he asked a little tartly.

Without replying Eunamtuck stepped inside and sat down with the canvas knapsack held on his knees.

"Me t'ink me got somet'ing for yo'," he stated calmly.

Then while the banker waited in some wonder Eunamtuck methodically unstrapped the bag and unceremoniously tumbled its contents out upon the desk.

"My ——!" Kellough sputtered, meanwhile pawing at the money with twitching fingers. "Where did you get it?"

"Back in mountains," Eunamtuck answered placidly.

Forgetful of decorum, Kellough fairly whooped out his joy which quickly brought a scurrying crowd of employees to rejoice with him.

Eventually their delirium passed sufficiently to enable them to make a tabulated check of the recovered bills.

"It's all there but twenty dollars," Kellough announced with a sigh of relief at the close of the check.

At that, with a chuckle of remembrance, Eunamuck drew out of his pocket a badly crumpled twenty-dollar bill and tossed it over to the banker.

"Me findum dat bill at dere camp de first morning," he exclaimed cheerfully. "Me smellum. Takamsin carry um all right. Pullum out him pocket dat night. Mebbeso lookum for string, me no know. Me t'ink, now, when dey rob dis bank, Takamsin stealum dat bill for himself.

Byembym killum Huddle an' stealum de rest of monish. *Hias cultus* dat mans. Me no wantum dis bill. Me forget all 'bout it dat's all. Me no want to steal um like Takamsin."

"It's yours anyway and a lot more," Kellough said happily. "Here—" he held out a package of bills to the Indian—"take this. The bank offered a reward of a thousand dollars for the recovery of the money and you've won it."

But the big Indian only shook his head.

"Me chief of police," he stated without emotion. "Me findum monish. Me bringum back yo'. Dat's all right. Me no wantum."

"Take it," the banker still insisted. "Don't you understand? It's yours."

THE big Indian sat unmoved for a time, deaf to the other's words. At length, however, a smile began to play over his big genial face.

"Injum boys agency," he intoned, "gettum up ball-team. Needum bats, needum suits, needum everyt'ing. Lots uv monish all dem t'ings cost. *Hiyu skookum* for dem boys, play ball."

He reached out his big hand and took the proffered money.

"Me takum," he announced. "Dem boys heap havum all dem t'ings now. Yo' bet yo' my life."

THE GOODLY COMPANY

by Ad. B. Shuster

COME, all of you who have combed the sea
And are tanned by alien suns;
Sit you down by my fire with me.
The sand in the hour glass runs.

You who have drawn your chairs to board
In the rat-nest Malay shack;
Who have faced the heat and the mongrel horde—
Who have gone to hell and back!

You who have roamed nor asked the why;
Who have thrown into life your all—
Come into port where the old men die.
The brown leaves slowly fall.

So, it's welcome all, and a pledge, forsooth,
Will you stand for a toast with me?
Here's to the roving heart of Youth,
To the goodly company!

The Corruption of Deacon Munden

A Complete Novelette

by Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "Frog," "To the Dogs," etc.

NO ONE in his senses would have taken "Deacon" Munden for a fighter. He was too delicately molded. He was a little above medium height and well-framed, but slim, undeveloped, tender looking. Nor had he the face of a fighter. It was a thin face, with hollow cheeks, small though finely made features, and a broad, smooth forehead. He had big blue eyes, serious eyes that seldom smiled and never frowned, and thick brown hair.

Fight! The Deacon abhorred the word. He loved peace. The son of a minister, he had been born and reared to revere that word. So far as any one on that ship could see, his only reason for enlisting in the Navy was to carry the love-thy-neighbor doctrine out upon the high and briny blue, where the best of men will sometimes forget themselves, hark to the call of the brute within, and fight.

A pacifist to the roots of him, "Deac." He never failed to show up just in time to stop a fight. Always, the moment an argument attained that white-hot point where the two shipmates began smearing mud on each other's ancestors, in came the Deacon, softly, gently, but ever so impressively. And he never failed to turn an exchange of blows into a handshake.

No, he was no sissy. At least none of the *Rolling Lou's* five hundred bluejackets had ever so dubbed him. There was nothing effeminate about Deac. He was a lad of fine sensibilities, and as fine a shipmate as ever donned a flat hat. He didn't smoke, chew, drink, swear—but who could hate him for that? He never changed. Three and a half years he had been on the big scout cruiser, ever since leaving the training station; and he had always been the same—quiet, retiring, though never haughtily aloof, conscientious in his duties, which were those of a yeoman in the pay-office, always intensely in earnest, and ever glad to hand over his last nickle to a worthy cause. A sissy isn't the tiniest part of that.

Then, one balmy sunny morning, when the *Lou* was bound south to join the fleet at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the winter rendezvous, quite by accident a shipmate discovered that the Deacon had a flaw. The shipmate was Jimmy Forbes, a brawny machinist's mate. He chanced to lay hold of Deac by the ribs from behind, in one of those affectionate, how's-the-old-boy ways, just below the armpits, as Deac leaned over the rail watching the flying fish rise out of the dark blue water and go soaring.

Never had those gobs on the *Lou's* topside witnessed such antics. The Deacon leaped four feet, straight up. He came down spinning, his fists whirling about him like the propeller blades of an aeroplane. And in that moment he performed a Jekyll-Hyde shift of personalities. When he stopped whirling there was blazing red in his eyes, and he was snarling like a wolf.

Big Forbes stood there grinning. The Deacon charged him. He swung his right fist as he charged. Such a wallop! Just alongside of the point of Forbes' chin, on the button. The big man dropped like a log.

That was all. When Forbes came to, several minutes later, Deac wanted to give him his bag, hammock and ditty-box. All humbleness, self-abasement, Deac would have given Forbes all the money he had on the books, two years' pay. Deac rarely drew money on a pay day; didn't need any. Forbes, however, was a good sport. He grinned, and they shook hands.

Thus began Deac's troubles. From that moment on, his was a rocky road. His bosom secret was out. Like wildfire the word flashed about the big scout's deck's—the Deacon had sensitive ribs. Forthwith every gob on the ship wanted to prod him in those ribs. Which they did, from that day on, whenever and wherever they caught him napping, leaning over the rail, seated on a chest or ditty-box, asleep in his hammock.

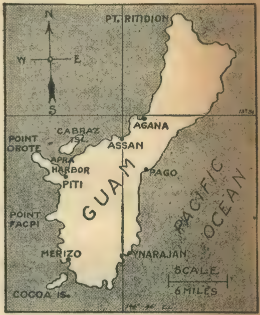
Not that the *Rolling Lou's* gobs were mean, small-natured. They were normal bluejackets, always ready to go the limit, take a black eye, a broken nose, a few broken ribs, anything within reason to stir up a kick of excitement.

Deac neither blackened any eyes nor broke any noses. But more than one man did he put to sleep with that right swing. He always planted his fist on the button. Most times he clipped the wrong man. For in the few red moments following one of those proddings, all faces looked alike to Deac. He got the nearest shipmate, and nine times out of ten, some innocent.

Once he came near caving in a shipmate's ribs. Mule-fashion, Deac did that; threw up both heels, when the man crept up behind him at the rail and jabbed him in the ribs. His would-be tormentor just grunted, "Unk!" and down he went. But the worst of that was, Deac went overboard in the bargain.

Still they gave him no peace. Day in, day out they kept it up. The *Lou* arrived at Guantanamo Bay and anchored in the maze of battleships, cruisers, destroyers, tugs and auxiliaries. Weeks passed. The Deacon became the talk of the fleet. Gobs and gobs from other ships came visiting aboard the *Lou*, solely for the purpose of witnessing one of those much talked of ticklings of Deacon Munden. He came to be known as the most ticklish man in the Navy.

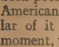
Deac was a much-worried lad. Dark semicircles appeared below his eyes, and the hollows in his cheeks grew deeper. He retired into himself, became sullen and glum. In moody silence he remained close to his desk in the pay-office. There, with his back to the bulkhead, he was free from their ruthless goadings. Also he slept there in the pay-office. He was seen about decks only when on his way to meals, and then he moved swiftly, as the crow flies, and kept an eye peeled over each shoulder.



He probably would have thus finished the remaining two months of his enlistment, mewed up in the pay-office. But Fate had decreed otherwise. One afternoon, through the open portholes in the pay-office Deac heard voices that caused him to stiffen in his chair. They were angry, snarling voices. Deac arose, stepped over to a porthole and stood listening.

Yes, it was an argument up on the forecastle. The voices he recognized as those of "Slug" Mathews and "Bull" Wilson. They were wrangling over the big fight scheduled for that evening over at Fisherman's Point between Mickey Dover, the best welterweight in the fleet, and Alonzo Cruz, a fast Cuban.

This bout was the biggest event of the winter. The gobs of the fleet were backing Mickey Dover down to their socks, and their money had been finding eager takers. Fifty thousand dollars of fleet money had been pooled and given into the hands of an American promoter in Havana. Every dollar of it was covered. Then in the last moment, this very morning, from the battleship on which Mickey Dover was serving, the *Minnie,* had come the word that the fight might have to be called off; that Dover had injured his right shoulder in working out. It was this that led up to the argument between Slug and Bull up on the forecastle, to which Deac was listening through the porthole in the pay-office.



"I SAID it an' I'll say it again!" growled the voice of Slug. "Bum shoulder, me eye! Dover's got a case o' yeller! He's afraid o' the greaser!"

Now Bull Wilson, Deac knew, was one of Mickey Dover's most fanatical admirers. Therefore he wasn't surprized at Bull's snappy return.

"An' I'll tell you just this once more, Slug Mathews. An' yuh better git me! Do that kind o' thinkin' under your lid! Don't gas off about Mickey Dover where I can hear yuh!"

Slug retorted that he would gas off when, where and to whom he pleased; and if any cared not to listen they could stuff their ears. Bull retaliated with a statement to the effect that Slug's great-grandfather had had a yellow streak.

It had gone far enough, thought Deac. It must be repeated that by nature, education and habit he was a pacifist. He bolted out of the pay-office, ran aft, up a ladder, then galloped forward to the forecastle.

Arms crooked, fists bunched, heads thrust forward, Slug and Bull stood glaring at each other like two mad gorillas. Both were bull-necked, heavy-jowled, leather-skinned, and could fight; the outcome was a toss-up.

Stepping between them Deac placed a hand against each of their lusty chests and gently thrust them apart.

"Fellows, be shipmates," he said, in low, earnest tones. "Whatsoever ye would that thy shipmate should do to you, do you even so to him."

"I'd have 'im blacken me eye, if he's able!" snarled Slug.

"On'y one way to find out," Bull retorted. Each tried to clear Deac's outstretched arm and get to the other. But with a death grip at the V of each of their jumpers, Deac held them apart. And while so doing he talked in that low, convincing way of his, quoting fragments of the Sermon on the Mount, and interspersing these with fragments of his own simple but sound philosophy. They stopped growling, the red left their eyes; they relaxed and listened. One had to listen to Deac. He had the gift of compelling attention. It was partly personality, the serious, unpretentious attitude of him, and partly the happy knack he had of expressing himself.

Finally he took the right hand of Slug and placed it within the right hand of Bull.

"Be shipmates," he said, and backed out from between them, a faint smile on his fine, sensitive face.

As Deac backed away forward, rubbing his hands together as if washing them of pollution, Slug and Bull turned and stood shoulder to shoulder watching him, grins on their hard faces. Those grins, however, were not occasioned by anything funny they saw in Deac. They were looking beyond Deac, at another shipmate, one "Slippery" Sanders, who, with the stealthy silence of a shadow, was creeping up behind the Deacon. The Deacon was about to be jabbed.

"Watch your step!" Slug grunted in an aside to Bull.

"Watch yours," Bull returned.

The same warning was being flashed from nearly every pair of eyes on the forecastle. For when Deac was poked in the ribs no man on that ship cared to be in the way of his wallop. Besides the Deacon himself, the only man on the forecastle who was not on tiptoe in that moment, was Ensign Woodward, the *Rolling Lou's* athletic officer. He had just stepped out of the break of the superstructure deck and was walking forward, his eyes on the deck, totally unaware of what was coming off.

Almost in the snap of a finger it happened. No one laughed this time. There was nothing to laugh at. Instead of a comedy the *Lou's* gobs witnessed a tragedy. Just as Ensign Woodward came up behind Slug and Bull—these standing shoulder to shoulder facing Deacon a dozen feet forward—Slippery Sanders reached out a long arm and jabbed Deac in the ribs.

Deac let out an undignified squawk, "Urk!" and shot straight up. He landed sitting down, but bounced right up again. For a few seconds he spun. When he stopped his wild eyes were blazing like an infuriated tiger's at Slug and Bull, still shoulder to shoulder a dozen feet away. A moment he glared, then he rushed them. They separated, Bull dodging inboard, Slug outboard, Deac plunging between them, straight into Ensign Woodward.

Ensign Woodward was an all-around athlete; a bulldog on the gridiron, a whirlwind on the diamond and an artist in the ring—as clever a boxer as Annapolis ever had. He saw Deac coming just in time to meet him with a stiff-arm jab. Deac went under it, driving his right and left to the officer's ribs. And he followed that up with a shower of rights and lefts. Ensign Woodward backed away, covering up as best he could.

With a dozen shipmates crowding up behind him, Deac followed up his man. Eager hands reached out and tried to grab him, but as well might they have tried to lay hold of a squirming wildcat. And no less vain were their lusty efforts to shout reason into his ears. In those few moments of red the Deacon was impervious to reason. He was stark mad. He had his eye on just one thing—that chin before him. To plant his fist on that chin was the one maniacal desire that dominated him. He didn't know it was an officer's chin; he didn't know it was anybody's in particular.

One pair of hands did succeed in clutching Deac's arm between shoulder and elbow. Deac jerked it free, then with a backhand swipe rapped the well-meaning shipmate across the mouth with his knuckles. His mouth full of blood, the well-meaning shipmate staggered away backward. Deac then made another lunge for his man. Bull Wilson leaped in front of him. Deac's right fist flashed in an overheard arc. *Spat.* On the button. Bull never knew what struck him.

"Stand clear, everybody!" Ensign Woodward shouted. "Let 'im come!"

It was too one-sided to be called a fight. Indeed Ensign Woodward was an artist with his fists; he had that happy combination of speed and judgment that makes champions. He outweighed the Deacon by twenty pounds; he had reach and height on him. But he was outclassed. With all his skill he could not touch this whirlwind of fury. He got no opportunity even to try to touch Deac. Deac came right in—*zip*, *spat*, *thud*—and the best the officer could do was back away and cover up and keep on covering up.

It lasted only a minute. Again Deac's right fist flashed in a sweeping overhead arc. It would have been a sturdy jaw that could have withstood the shock of that terrific smash. And it was on the button.

THE red was now dimming away. Quivering like a jelly-fish Deac stood over the fallen officer. He saw everything in a blur as through befogged glasses, and the voices about him seemed to come from afar. He felt only half awake, as one coming out of a hideous nightmare. His shipmates were jostling him aside. He heard:

"Come on, let's get 'em down to the sick bay! Easy now, easy! Come on! Shake a leg! Let's go!"

And before his swimming vision passed the two groups bearing Ensign Woodward and Bull Wilson away toward the forward hatch which led down to the sick bay.

Deac knew nausea as he staggered outboard to the rail. He was trembling to his hair-ends and finger-tips. In the swirling haze about him were scores of faces, all looking at him. Not one of them wore a grin. Only dark gray sympathy on all sides. And on his ears fell the somber words:

"Great God! Man, oh man! Wallopin' an officer! Ten years!"

A powerful hand clutched at his elbow. Deac turned to face "Catfoot" Snell, the chief master-at-arms, or ship's chief of police. Then Snell's gruff voice—

"Awright, you fightin' sky pilot, just steam along with your uncle."

Aft, down two ladders to the berth deck, then forward to the brig, or ship's prison, Snell marched him. A choking lump rose to Deac's throat as Catfoot pushed him over the threshold into the five by seven cell. A bang of the door, a click of the key, and there he was, like a trapped rat, in a dark and stuffy dungeon with only a ten-inch porthole, heavily barred to admit air and daylight.

Deac paced athwartships, three short steps each way. It was the darkest hour of his twenty-three years. Worse, there were darker hours to come. He was headed for prison. An unprovoked assault on an officer. Why, in the Navy men were sentenced to longer prison terms for that offense than for stealing!

"Prison!"

A chill shook him as he uttered the word. And it echoed back to him again and again till his stuffy dungeon seemed to ring with it. Prison! He groaned as he imaged the white faces of his mother and father when this cruel intelligence reached them.

That choking lump was again in his throat, as he visioned his faded but still beautiful little mother, doubt in her big blue eyes as she spoke the words:

"Prison? Our boy Richard in prison?"

And how would his sober, serious-mannered father, the pale little small-town preacher in New England, face his Sunday morning flock after this?

"Young Dick Munden is in a naval prison!" would be in every mouth.

It would be the talk of the town, how he had disgraced his mother and father. And there were those who would sneer:

"I thought so. He should have gone to prison long ago, when he all but murdered Jack Summers! Yes, he's where he belongs."

Those were bad moments for Deac. Bitter and rebellious were his feelings as the unjustness of his plight burrowed in on him. Abruptly the faith education of his entire life fell from him. He began questioning. Where was this God's justice his father exhorted about? In the dealing of the cards, for instance, one being was birthed to a throne, another in the gutter. One got a royal flush on the deal, another a Hoboken straight. One was born a master mind, another an imbecile. Why? Why!

He knew how his father would answer to this.

"God's ways, my son, are not for man to question."

Perhaps. But it didn't look fair to Deac, down there in his dark little dungeon. He felt that he hadn't received a fair deal; that the cards had been stacked against him. He had been born thus, with proud ribs. How could a fellow help what was wrought in the very textures and fibers of him? He had striven hard to overcome this weakness.

Prison! He hadn't wilfully committed a crime. What he had done, he had done because he was so made. Had they left him alone he wouldn't have done it. The shipmate whose thumb had rendered him red-eyed should be thrown into prison, not he.

A black hour passed. Then the key rattled in the lock and the door opened. Deac didn't look around, for he knew it was Catfoot. He continued leaning against the outboard bulkhead, gazing through the porthole bars at the westering sun.

"Say, you," Catfoot growled, "got a knife on yuh?"

Without turning his head, Deac fished out his jackknife and held it out behind him. Catfoot then reached out and took Deac's neckerchief from him.

"What's the idea?" queried the Deacon.

Catfoot only grunted and grinned, and went out, slamming the door.

Deac too was grinning now. What could have given the chief jimmy such a wild notion, that he, Deac, might cut his throat, or hang himself with his neckerchief? What did Catfoot think he was? A lunatic, no doubt. Then—and with the thought the grin froze on Deac's face—then perhaps, after all, they wouldn't send him to prison; indeed his chances looked far better for the "Red House."

Came another thought. And it smote him like a blow from a sledge hammer. He had struck an officer. The officer's head had crashed on the hard deck. Had he——

Sweat broke through Deac's skin from head to toes, cold sweat. A moment longer he clung with his fingers to the rim of the porthole; then his fingers relaxed their hold, his knees gave way and he sagged down to the deck.

Sunset—then twilight. Still Deac sat huddled against the outboard bulkhead, numb in body and brain, and cold. He wanted to get up and pound on that steel door, bring some one, any one, and find out. But fear over-rode the impulse. He wanted to know, but shrank from the terror of knowing.

Murder! The word flooded his consciousness. In his disordered mind he heard it being shouted at him; he saw it printed in big red letters across the bulkheads.

The door opened again. Deac saw two pairs of shoes. The overhead light was switched on. Then Catfoot's voice—

"I'll skate aft, sir, an' bring the mess cook with his chow."

That "sir." Deac looked up into the pale but smiling face of Ensign Woodward. Had some one tickled him, Deac wouldn't have straightened up to his feet more quickly. He shot up. For a moment he stood there, reeling drunkenly, one hand to his forehead, unbelief in his glassy eyes. Then in a high, thin voice:

"You're not dead, sir?"

Catfoot went out. Ensign Woodward closed the door, then turned and grinned at the Deacon. With one hand he was stroking a jaw that was apparently sore. Only his upper lip moved when he spoke.

"Munden," he began slowly and with great distinctness, "what — in — the - e — blazes ever made you come at me?"

A tough one for poor Deac. He squirmed and fidgeted a few moments. Then:

"I was tickled, sir!"

"Yes, I know. I've heard. But——"

"Things went red, sir," Deac broke in. "It's always that way, when some one pokes me in the ribs from behind. I go wild, don't know what I'm doing, and sail right into the first one I see. I've always been that way, sir, from a baby up. You happened to be in the way. I didn't know it was you, sir!"

THE young officer studied Deac's wrought-up features. There was no doubting the sincerity in those deep-blue eyes. He had always liked this youngster for his clean, earnest ways. And despite that terrific wallop on his formidable jaw, he liked him none the less now. If anything he liked him more for that very wallop.

"Why should I do anything like that, sir?" Deac added. "Even if I had reason to bear you a grudge? It's a general court-martial offense to strike an officer."

Ensign Woodward nodded soberly.

"That's why I came to see you," he said. "I'm going aft to the captain in a few minutes. He's sent for me. No doubt it's concerning this affair he wants to see me. And I wanted to talk to you first—because —well, I didn't think you knew exactly what you were doing up there. Anyhow, I'm not going to prefer any charge against you."

Deac thanked him, not profusely, but earnestly.

"However," the officer resumed, "I can't promise, I don't know—" he hesitated, frowning—"it's hard telling how the captain will look at things. You're acquainted with his ways. I've an idea he'll hand me the —— balling out an officer ever got for declining to press the charge. Chances are the old hooker'll push things against you himself anyhow. But we'll do the best we can."

Deac thanked him again. There was a queer flicker in Ensign Woodward's dark eyes now.

"By the way," he broke off, "you seem to know a lot about throwing those fists of yours. And you swing a pretty heavy wallop," feeling of his sore jaw, "for a lad of your weight. Who taught you all that stuff?"

Deac smiled sadly.

"I never was taught, sir," he answered. "I used to do a lot of boxing. I was always keen for the sport—that is, boxing, not fighting. I wouldn't fight a man in the ring for a million dollars! Nor would I go a hop-skip-and-jump to see a championship fight. I don't call that sport, sir—two men trying to batter each other into insensibility. Bestiality, I call it! Along with the Spanish bull-fight, it belongs in ——, sir!"

Ensign Woodward shook his head and grinned.

"You're just a wee bit bigoted there, lad," he said indulgently. "Comparing the American prize fight to the Spanish bull-fight. Nay, nay, my son that's about ninety-nine per cent. fallacy. I think I could convince you if I had the time. Anyhow, we'll just scud over that. You say you used to put the mitts on a lot; you liked the sport?"

"For the science of it, yes, sir."

"Uh-huh. But how is it that in the three and a half years you've been on this ship, we've never seen you put on the gloves with any one?"

For a few moments Deac swallowed and looked down at the deck.

"That's only half of the story, sir," he said finally. "The rest of it is, you never will see me put on the gloves with any one. The last time I had them on was and will be the last time. That was five years ago, sir."

"Of course, that's your affair," Ensign Woodward said. "No doubt you've a good reason."

"I have, sir. And I don't mind telling it to you. The last time I had the gloves on I came within an ace of causing the death of the best friend I've ever had."

"Lose your head?"

"In a clinch, yes, sir," Deac replied. "We were sparring, a fellow named Jack Summers and I. In a clinch he got his arms around me and dug his thumb into my ribs. I don't know what happened in the few moments after that. All I remember is red. I went mad, sir, just as I did this afternoon. They told me afterward that all I did was push Jack clear and swing. I struck him on the jaw and he fell. His head struck on a stone.

"Oh, he came around finally. But there were days and days, hopeless days when he lingered between life and death. And me—well, I don't like to talk about it.

"It was a bad turn in the road for me, sir. I couldn't describe what my feelings were. Everything seemed changed; I felt like some one different. None of my former ambitions or desires any longer appealed. I'd always been a hungry reader. I now detested books. Baseball and football disgusted me and the mere thought of boxing would drive me into a fit of madness. Companionship! The sound of a human voice made me hold my ears!

"What made things worse was—well, there was a girl about that time, sir. Also there were a few long noses in that town, and they commenced to sniff. Pretty soon a lot of scandal suckers commenced to lick their lips. Over their teacups and behind their fans they proceeded to grind me into sausage. I'd done the deed on purpose, they said, because I was jealous of Jack Summers. If not, then I belonged in a madhouse.

"I was only eighteen, had just finished high school. My people wanted to send me to college. They had me headed for the pulpit. You can imagine, sir," Deac grinned, "how the long noses must have sniffed over that. Anyhow, I didn't go to college. I couldn't. I wasn't in mental shape for anything. All I could do was brood about in moody silence. And that's all I did, sir, for over a year.

"That's how I come to be in the Navy, sir. This life appealed, seemed to offer what I needed—excitement, adventure; anyhow it was a change. Chances are if I hadn't enlisted I'd now be in some lunatic asylum."

Deac paused a moment, and then added with a grin:

"As things look now, sir, I've still got a royal chance for that, the Red House. Anyhow, that's why you never see me put on the gloves with anyone."

Catfoot now returned, accompanied by the mess cook who brought Deac's supper on a large tray, sauerkraut and bow-wows, prunes, bread, butter and tea.

"Well—" Ensign Woodward roused himself—"that was unfortunate. However, we're getting away from the issue. I must get aft. I'll see you later, Munden, and we'll talk things over.

The officer backed out. The mess cook put the tray on deck, and then followed suit. Catfoot slammed shut the door, and Deac was alone with his sauerkraut and bow-wows and prunes.

Deac ate nothing. He passed another long and somber hour looking out through the bars of his porthole. Night was now on, and thousands of lights shone. The great fleet looked like a city on the water. Soft music floated on the cool night breeze. Boats plied to and fro, tooting their whistles, some of them close enough to send waves pelting with a splash against the *Lou's* side a few feet below Deac's barred porthole.

Now she swung with the tide, so that Deac could see the majestic flagship anchored out near the harbor entrance at the head of and midway between the two columns of dreadnaughts and battleships. She was sending a message to the fleet by blinker.

Deac knew the code, which is the same as used in radio, but he was not quite up to the speed with which that signalman on the flagship was ripping it off. He could read only a word or two here and there. He made it out to be something about tonight's big fight; he got the words "substitute," "Mickey Dover," "nine o'clock," "Fisherman's Point," and a few other fragments pertaining to landing facilities.

Then Catfoot brought the mess cook back for the dishes.

"Who's taking Mickey's place tonight, chief?" Deac said to Catfoot.

"How the —— do I know!" snarled the hard-boiled chief. "And what the —— do you care! Figurin' on goin', are yuh?"

"No. But I thought you were."

"Yah! Me, hey! Fat chance I got o' seein' the fight, with a general court-martial prisoner on me hands!"

"What's a matter, Deac? Ain't yuh scoffin'?" put in the mess cook, standing akimbo, looking down at the tray of untouched food.

"He's on a hunger strike," growled Catfoot.

"Just what do you mean, a general court-martial prisoner?" Deac demanded. "I haven't even been up before the captain yet."

"Y'ain't, hey?" Catfoot grinned. "Well, yuh will be in about fifteen minutes. The old man's gonna hold special mast for yuh."

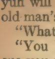
"What, this evening?"

"You heard me! They're gonna barbecue you so quick it'll make yuh dizzy! Be standin' by."

Bang went the door.

Mast! This time of the day? Deac wondered. He'd never heard of the captain of a man-o'-war holding mast in the evening.

Mast, you should know, means court.



"BEAR" BLACKSTONE, captain of the *Rolling Lou*, was notorious for his hard-boiled qualities. He wept tears of joy every time he awarded a general court-martial. His executive officer, "Carbolic" Wiltz, was of the same clay. In the matter of being hard and mean, in fact, these two were as nearly alike as two men could be. Slightly harder than either of them, though in a coarser way, was Catfoot Snell.

Little mercy could a poor gob in trouble expect from that combination. Stepping up before that high portable desk—the Bear's bar of judgment—was like marching to the gallows. They had the poor culprit sentenced before the charge against him was read. Usually, if he did have anything to say in his defense, he didn't say it. They scared it out of him. With the owl-eyed, florid and gray-whiskered face of the Bear in front of him, Carbolic's hawk eyes and eagle beak to the left, and Catfoot's bulldog mug to the right, whatever the unfortunate gob might have in mind by way of palliation or vindication, froze there.

And yet once in a while old Bear Blackstone showed a twist of humanness. For one thing he had a colossal sense of humor. That was the way to the heart of the Bear, through his risibles. A man who could make him laugh could have anything. He was hard to tickle, but, once tickled, the thunder gusts of laughter he belched forth would dim the trumpings of an elephant to faint whisperings.

He had two other weaknesses. One was raw meat. We'll pass over that. The other was prize fighters. A good pug was sure of many favors and rapid promotion on the Bear's ship.

Ensign Woodward took advantage of those weak spots in the Bear's make-up that evening. Five minutes after saluting him back on the quarter-deck, Ensign Woodward had him chuckling. A few minutes more and he had him roaring. And as they paced fore and aft, back on the Bear's private section of the quarter-deck, in the outer verge of the glow from the gangway lights looking for all the world like Santa Claus and Beau Brummel, the Bear's convulsive gusts grew louder and louder.

Forward about the gangways in the glare of the lights, crowded gobs and gobs. Eager expectancy shone on every face. They were waiting for the word on the big fight. Who was to take Mickey Dover's place against Alonzo Cruz was still unknown. They had their good dollars on that fight, those *Rolling Lou* tars, nearly all of them up to the skipper, inclusive. Forsooth, the old Bear himself had a thousand dollars on the American, but this was a dark secret.

Seven o'clock. Still nothing definite on the fight. The waiting gobs began to chafe. The Bear and Ensign Woodward still had their heads together, back in the dim light of the Bear's sanctum sanctorum.

Then abruptly that confab broke up. Ensign Woodward saluted the Bear and then sauntered away forward. The Bear bellowed for his orderly. The orderly came on the gallop.

"Signal blank! Signal blank!" shouted the Bear.

And as the marine went galloping away after the pad of blanks, his Hirsuteness roared to the officer of the deck:

"Inform the executive officer I'm going to hold mast in twenty minutes! Have the chief master-at-arms bring the prisoner aft! Bear a hand!"

When the orderly came racing aft with the pad of blanks, the Bear snatched it from him. He then stepped briskly forward to the gangway light, and there wrote a message to the fleet athletic officer.

"To the bridge! To the bridge!" he barked at the orderly, who took the message at arm's length. "Have them send that to the flagship rush!"

IT WAS twenty minutes passed seven when Catfoot marched Deac aft to the guillotine. Deac knocked his heels before the high desk which stood on the quarter-deck, a little abaft of the starboard gangway, saluted, took off his hat and stood at attention facing the Bear who stood behind the desk, his short, squat figure firmly planted, his strawberry-like nose shining like a beacon in the glare of the gangway light, his gray whiskers glistening, his round goggling eyes blazing like a cat's.

Out of the corner of his left eye Deac saw a sharp point, or hook, rather—Carbolic's nose—and a little above it two glittering beady eyes. On his right was the scowling mug of Catfoot. They had him going and coming. Like a man awaiting the noose or the ax, he was beyond all succor, human or providential. His sheet anchor was gone, so to speak. He was totally at the mercy of the notorious trio, the father, son and holy terror.

A hum of confused mutterings and whisperings rose from the *Lou's* upper deck as the ship's writer, a thin little chief yeoman, read the charge—

"Assaulting an officer."

There was some slight stir. Then a hush, fraught with ominousness, as the Bear cleared his throat. It sounded like the rumble of distant thunder. Ensign Woodward slipped up from the sidelines and stood looking over Deac's shoulder at the Bear. For a moment the Bear glared back at him over Deac's shoulder. Then shifting his glare to Deac, he sniffed, as sniffs a real bear when he scents meat, his whiskers bristled, and then from up out of the fat of him came a swinish grunt.

"Yesh-yesh-yesh-yes," he prefaced with his wonted bruskness. "Ah-ah-ah-ah—have you anything to say?"

"Sir, I—" Deac began.

"Yesh-yesh-yesh-yes," the Bear cut him off. "That'll do, that'll do, that will do."

With which the Bear turned and said to Carbolic—

"The cat-o'-nine-tails would be the remedy, eh?"

Carbolic's hook went up and down in emphatic concurrence and his beady eyes glittered with satanic glee at mention of that obsolete instrument of persuasion.

"In the old navy," the Bear went on to Deac, "we used to settle cases of this description—ah—just like that—" snapping his fingers. "Three, four, five hundred lashes of the cat——" His voice broke.

"I seen 'em git worse 'n that, sir," Catfoot oared in.

"You shut up!" the Bear snapped sidewise at him, and then went on:

"In the American Navy there are just two things worse than a man who will strike an officer."

He hesitated a moment. Then all in a breath he shouted:

"A murderer and a pervert!"

He paused.

"Have you anything to say?"

Deac swallowed and stammered, but could form no words. Ensign Woodward spoke up.

"Captain, may I speak a few words?"

"Certainly you may not!" With which the Bear burst forth in oration. He plunged into a ponderous discourse on the virtues of discipline and the evils of laxity in dealing with breaches of discipline. As he warmed up to his subject his voice rose in pitch and volume. He brought arms and hands into play; waved grandly, drove fist into palm, banged on the desk. Time and again, with tears gushing from his big glassy eyes and his whole frame shaking with emotion, he harked back to the bygone days when the Navy had the cat-o'-nine-tails. For fifteen minutes he bellowed. His face was scarlet one minute and white the next. At times he lost the thread of his argument, and all he emitted was an incoherent jumble of snarls and growls.

"Cat-o'-nine-tails! Thousand lashes! Cut off his ears! Hang him to the yardarm by the tongue!" He reserved just breath enough to ask Deac if he had anything to say.

"Sir, I——" Deac began again.

"Yesh-yesh-yesh-yes. That—will—do!"

But Deac was not of the stuff that can be scared to death with mere noise.

"Sir," he persisted firmly, "when I enlisted in the United States Navy, I didn't cease to be an American. I claim the constitutional right——"

"Silence!" thundered the Bear, with a bang of his fist on the desk. What Deac had said, however, had him stumped for the moment. He was disconcerted. He turned to Carbolic.

"Any suggestion, Mr. Wiltz?"

"Why — ah — " Carbolic fidgeted nervously. "Ah-ah—well, it's a case, sir, that calls for all possible promptness of action, brevity. I should suggest that justice be administered without delay, sir."

"Yesh-yesh-yes. Without delay, to be sure."

Whereupon the Bear heaved a great sigh. Then leaning over the desk, so that his bewhiskered face was a foot from Deac's, he queried:

"Did you say something about constitutional right?"

"Yes, sir." And Deac's chin was high and his shoulders well back, as he went on. "My ancestry on both sides traces back to the Puritans, sir! I claim the constitutional right of an American, the right to state my case; the right to fight, sir!"

The Bear stiffened. For a few seconds his goggling eyes met Deac's; then they shifted to the left and came to rest on Ensign Woodward's. Conscious looks passed between these two; silent communication.

"Yesh-yes," the Bear said. "The right to fight—to fight. Oh, I say, Mr. Woodward, he claims the right to fight."

And then, with a flash of his eyes, a grin, and a bang of his fist on the desk—

"Swallowed the hook, by thunder!"

But if those gobs looking on from the sidelines expected to hear the Bear say "general court-martial," they got fooled. For the next thing old Bruno did was turn and roar at the officer of the deck:

"My bahge! My bahge! My bahge!"

The bugler intercepted the command, and promptly sounded the call for the captain's barge to come alongside the gangway.

All hands were now on tiptoe. Every one wondered what the Bear could be pulling off.

"This mast will adjourn," boomed old Santa Claus, "and reconvene at nine o'clock tomorrow morning if necessary."

Then, after a moment's pause, he turned and addressed Ensign Woodward.

"You have your instructions, Mr. Woodward. Take charge of the prisoner and proceed on duty assigned."

"Aye aye, sir," Ensign Woodward responded, and then took Deac by the arm and led him over to the gangway.

There they waited, while the captain's barge swung out from the forward boom, swerved round astern and came up alongside. Ensign Woodward saluted the officer of the deck and requested permission to leave the ship on duty.

"Very well," said the officer of the deck.

Then arm in arm Ensign Woodward and Deac went down the gangway and stepped into the waiting barge. A clang of the gong, a rush of water, and away they raced across the crowded harbor toward Fisherman's Point.

It was now beginning to filter through the heads of the *Lou's* tars. The word came down from the signal bridge that the Bear had sent a rush message to the flagship, a half hour before, stating that the *Rolling Lou* had a man who was desirous of taking Mickey Dover's place against Alonzo Cruz, and urgently recommending approval. The fleet athletic officer had replied:

"Approved."

On top of that, the flagship had signaled the fleet that the fight would be held as scheduled with a man from the *Rolling Lou* substituting for Dover, the message of which Deac had read fragments through his barred porthole. In none of this communication was the name of the man substituting given; but it looked to the *Lou's* tars as if Deacon Munden was the boy.

They were not kept long speculating. Five minutes after Ensign Woodward and Deac had shoved off in the barge, the boatswain's mates were shouting:

"Now d'yuh hear there? All you men—who are going—to the-e-fight—at Fisherman's Point tonight—between Deacon Munden and Alonzo Cruz—muster at the port gangway at seven forty-five! Uniform undress whites!"

At this there went up from the *Rolling Lou's* decks such a roar as never before had echoed among the mountains of Guantanamo Bay.

"HEAR that?" Ensign Woodward said to Deac, as they disembarked over on Fisherman's Point. "The cat's out, lad."

"But I can't fight, sir!" Deac reiterated. "It's against my principles!"

"Now, lad, listen to common sense. Those are fine principles. But the point is, you're in a bad hole. You heard what the old man said—'This mast reconvenes at nine tomorrow morning, if necessary.' By 'if necessary' he meant 'if you fail to trim that Cuban.' "

They walked slowly up from the landing toward a cluster of bungalows, these the dwellings of officers of the marine detachment on the Point.

"Principles!" Ensign Woodward went on. "There's a bigger principle involved.

You've a mother and father, haven't you?"

"The best in the world, yes, sir."

"Well? You don't want to bring a lot of worry on them, do you? It won't be an easy matter for you to beat a general court-martial on the charge of assaulting an officer. You might win out in the end; again, you might not. At best it'll be a long-drawn-out and weary process. And take it from me, boy, old Bear Blackstone will hand you a general court tomorrow morning, if you don't get in there and fight tonight. He wanted to hand you one in the worst way. All that kept him from it was my springing this gag on him."

"But what made you. I don't understand yet, sir!"

"Well, you know Bear Blackstone. He always has been a nut on fighters. For years he's been trying to land a fleet champion on his ship. He'd rather see one of his men win a fight than be made a rear-admiral. And that's the spot in his nature I played on."

"But what chance have I got against a fighter like Cruz? He's trained down to the ounce. I haven't had the gloves on in five years! I wouldn't mind getting in there and boxing, trying to outpoint him if I thought I had a chance."

"Say, lad, I've seen this Cruz in action. Down in Santiago a month ago. He's not fast. Tough, that's all. He's got a haymaker, but he sends you a postal telling you when to expect it. Hang it, lad—" he slapped Deac on the back—"I could lick him myself, and I couldn't stand up to you for two minutes!"

"But I'm not trained, Mr. Woodward. This bout, I hear, is to go ten rounds. That's a long and heavy pull, even on a man prepared for it."

"I know. But it won't go ten rounds."

And Ensign Woodward chuckled.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"What could I mean? You'll flatten him out long before the tenth round."

"I'll do nothing of the kind, sir!" Deac shot back with heat and finality. "I said I'd go in there and box, try to outpoint him."

"But that means staying on your pins for ten long rounds, lad! And you're not trained."

"I won't fight."

"All right, then box! Get in and do your best. Conserve all you can. Take things easy in the beginning. Don't let him get to you. Watch your chances. And bear in mind, if you win, why, the chances are old Bear Blackstone will advance you to the rating of chief yeoman tomorrow morning."

"And if I lose, he'll do all he can to send me to prison," Deac finished for him. "A fine pig to be wearing the uniform of a naval officer, he is." He laughed. "And they shot such men as Abraham Lincoln."

He paused, then sobering, went on:

"All right, Mr. Woodward. I guess the only thing for me to do is go in and try. I'll do that. I'll do my best just to save my own neck, however, not to please Bear Blackstone. As you say, I don't want to bring a lot of worry on my mother and father. Furthermore, I've got two years' pay on the books, and you know what a general court would do to that."

"Gobble it all up," replied the officer.

"And send me to prison for, say, two years, making four years I'll have worked and fought for Uncle Sam for nothing."

And Deac laughed again.

"Come to think of it, Mr. Woodward," he went on ironically, "this is some democratic navy we've got. Less than two years ago, sir, we were out there on the wild waves, trying to make the world safe for democracy, as they put it. Fine sounding word that, democracy. Trouble is it doesn't mean anything in the Navy. It's all sound and no sense. Why, the laws and traditions governing this navy, sir, belong back in medieval times! Democracy!"

Deac probably would have kept on going indefinitely, for he was now pretty well warmed up. But just now Ensign Woodward had halted before a well-lighted bungalow and was opening the gate. Laughing, carefree voices issued out.

"Come on, Munden," said the ensign. "This is Lieutenant Johnson's house, marine officer. I'm going to leave you here, while I run out to the flagship and make arrangements with the fleet athletic officer. I want to get all the dope, also scare up a few seconds and some fighting togs for you."

They stamped up onto the front porch and entered the large living room unannounced. A game of cards was here in progress between four officers, two naval and two marine.

"Hello, Woody," they greeted in chorus.

"You fellows going to the fight?" was the way Woody opened the conversation.

"Fight? Why, it's off," one replied.

"Was, you mean. It's on again," said Woody. "You fellows are asleep over here. By the way, see if you can make this lad happy for an hour or so, will you, while I run out to the flagship? I'll be back."

"Sure. But wait, Woody! Who's taking Dover's place?"

Woody about-faced in the doorway and pointed to Deac.

"The fastest boy in the fleet," he said, "Deacon Munden. Take care of him. I'll be back. And don't forget, he's my find!"

With that Woody went.

"Deacon," said one of the marine officers, Captain Johnson, "you sit yourself down in that easy chair. If there's anything you want, sing out."

FROM eight o'clock on, Fisherman's Point looked like a brilliantly lighted ant-hill. Came an endless procession of boats and strings of boats, disembarking load after load of white-clad gobs. Also there were civilian boats, conveying Cuban sportsmen, mostly from Guantanamo City and Santiago.

At eight forty-five o'clock there were twenty-five thousand fight fanatics on the Point, and more still coming. All made for the baseball field, where thousands of lights, the moon like a big, white bull's-eye helping, spread daylight over the ring, which had been erected at second base.

There being only a few hundred seats, about the ring, for officers, the gobs and civilians squatted on the grass.

It was a happy mob. The Cubans were happy in the assurance of having doubled their dollars. Their terrible Cruz would make quick work of this American sailor. This unknown substitute would have no chance. Even the great Dover would have been no match for the terrible Cruz. The gobs too were happy. They were disappointed, of course, that their idol, Mickey Dover was unable to fight. But they were happy just the same. They'd see a fight that was the big idea. Of course their money was lost, the bets couldn't be officially declared off for the reason that officially there wasn't supposed to be any betting. But what mattered the loss of a few dollars. Money was good for spending and spending only.

The flagship's band was doing the honors. They opened with a time-honored number, "Good-by, Mr. Greenback." A short, fat tar, with a silver-tone tenor voice, climbed into the ring and took up the chorus. That is, he began. But he had sung not more than three words when a shower of white hats buried him.

The referee, an officer from one of the destroyers, stepped in the ring and signaled for silence. The cornet players helped him by sounding attention. He merely announced what all hands already knew, that Mickey Dover had injured his shoulder, and so forth.

As he was finishing, Alonzo Cruz, followed by his retinue, climbed through the ropes and sat down in his corner. Deacon Munden came a moment later, accompanied by Ensign Woodward, another officer and two gobs, both fighters well known in the fleet.

The mob gave Cruz a tremendous ovation when the referee introduced him. And with the whites of his rolling black eyes and his grinning white teeth the dusky-skinned Cuban showed that he liked it. Slipping off his purple bathrobe, Cruz bowed and bowed. He was a short, powerfully-made youngster, with a broad sweep of shoulders, long, muscular arms, a slim, supple body and stocky legs. Nature had made him for a fighter. Every inch of him suggested the sinewy strength and lithe agility of a tiger. And, if appearances counted for anything, he had that other requisite—confidence, a world of it.

The referee then introduced Deac.

"The fighting deacon of the *Rolling Lou!*" he shouted.

Another thunderous roaring and handclapping. But it broke sharply the instant Deac took off his bathrobe. There was dead silence, as the gaping gobs took in his slim, white-skinned make-up. He appeared to have about as much chance against the Cuban fighter as a clean-limbed thoroughbred horse would against a hungry jaguar. The mob sighed—

"Oo-oo-oo!"

Stage fright took hold of Deac's knees. The mass of faces rocked and swirled around him. Faces, faces everywhere—white, yellow, brown, black; smooth, mustached, goateed, bearded. Ripplings of laughter floated up. In a vague, blurred way Deac could make out:

"That's the fellow with the weak ribs!"

"What's the joke, anyway, puttin' that bird in?"

"Why don't they give us a run for our money?"

"Lot's o' brains, puttin' a child like that against that gorilla!"

"It's murder!"

Then suddenly there rose above the confusion of mutterings and babblings and yammerings a stentorian guffaw that caused Deac to look quickly to his left and downward. Sure enough, there he was down at the ringside—the Bear, convulsively shaking over some joke or other, the while goggling owl-eyed up at him. Beside him sat Carbolic, his thin, fox-like face twisted into a forced grin. And in the next instant Deac saw Catfoot's ugly visage, back in the mob a ways.

Deac set his teeth and tensed his knees and walked to his corner.

They were waiting for the gong. The mob was silent. Necks were stretching, eyes straining. The referee stood near the center of the ring. The seconds of both fighters were leaving through the ropes, all but Ensign Woodward, who tarried at Deac's side to speak a few final words of advice.

"Just keep your head now, lad," he cautioned. "Take it easy. Don't let him get to you. Remember, you've got a whole lot to win. Forget Bear Blackstone. You're not fighting this fight to please him. The old admiral has his eye on you, boy. I had a little chat with him, after leaving you a while ago. Win this fight, boy, and you've a royal chance of making paymaster. Straight! More than that. Think of what the boys of the fleet 'll dig up for you, if you win them this fight. Mickey Dover told me this evening that he'd figured this fight to net him three thousand dollars."

The mob began to bark:

"Let's go!"

Still Woody tarried at Deac's side.

"Get your eye on your man now, Munden," he continued. "Look him straight in the eye. Keep looking right at him as you wade in. That jaw, lad, lamp it, study it, hold it! It's yours, that jaw. Keep your eye on it!"

It flashed to Deac in that moment, Woody's game. But he awoke to it too late. Simultaneous with the clang of the gong Woody grabbed hold of Deac at the ribs and at the same time pushed him across the ring toward the advancing Cuban.

Deac shot out of his corner and came down spinning in the center of the ring. When he stopped whirling he was facing the referee. That officer knew red when he saw it. He backed away. Deac followed him, at such speed that Mr. Referee took to his heels and ran. And how he did run around that ring! Like a man fleeing from the ——! And Deac hot after him! Round and round they galloped, faster and faster.

And what a wild and unearthly screech the mob now turned loose! The mountains towering against the star-dotted sky must have trembled. The fishes in the bay must have all scudded seaward. It was ear-splitting! Thanks be, however, it lasted only a few moments. It broke, as abruptly as it had burst forth. Silence again.

Deac had knocked off chasing the referee, and was now facing Cruz. Facing him! He was rushing him! The mob gasped. Such a shower of gloves as Deac threw into that Cuban's face and body!

Zip zap zip zap zip zap.

"Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!" moaned the mob.

And Alonzo Cruz? Ah! The Terrible One knew not what to make of it. All he could see was gloves, flying gloves. It was raining gloves!

Zip zap zip zap, he got it right and left, on the snout, in the eyes, ribs, breadbasket. He retreated, and tried to cover up. But Deac had too many arms! There was no escaping his whirlwind of hooks, jabs and uppercuts. Seemed to Cruz he was fighting a dozen Deacs!

"Woof!" grunted the mob, as Cruz staggered backward across the ring from the impact of one the Deacon had planted almost on the button. Then:

"Get 'im, Deacon! Get 'im! Get 'im! Get 'im!" they clamored hilariously.

But the Deacon needed no coaching now. He followed his man right up. Just before the staggering Cruz backed into the ropes, for the third time in that day Deac's right fist cut the air in an overhead arc.

And for the third time in that day he planted it—on the button.

* * *

Ten Minutes

by Erle D. Hosmer

WHAM! The roaring concussion of a heavy gun fired in a small room, a howl and a shout:

"EE-ee-yowh! I got that 'un, Dan. It was a pink 'un with purple spots!"

In the adjoining room the bed springs creaked beneath Dan Leslie, the plantation manager.

"Cut that out, yuh crazy idiot," he growled. "You'll be——"

A rumbling, cavernous voice interrupted from the verandah:

"Ah yam Kher-rist. Petuh, wha hart thou?"

Silence. Outside the ghostly rustling and scraping of interlaced, broad banana leaves, the thrilling of innumerable insects, shrilling of tree-frogs, the mournful whistling of night-jars traditionally sadly calling upon some one to "whip-poor-Will;" and from a building across the railroad track, a few yards distant, the thrumming of a guitar jangling the same chord over and over again and a laborer's high-pitched, doleful nasal whining:

"Yo pi-enso en ti-i, con amor-oso empen-yo-o-o,
Y mir-ro siem-pre tu divin-na fa-a-az."

The song ceased abruptly and was followed by the resounding thud of chair legs and two pairs of bare feet hitting the floor in unison, and a startled shout—

"Meester Leselees! What eez de matter over zer?"

From afar through the soft velvety darkness of the still tropical night a locomotive wailed sadly—

"Oo-ah, Oo-oo-ah-ah-a-a-a."

"Hi, Dan, here they come again! Ee yowh!"

Wham!

The frightened voices of the laborers rang out—

"Meester Leselees, what passes?"

Silence. Then—

"De day hab come an' Kher-rist is heah!"

Dan Leslie lay frozen in his bed staring in slack-jawed dumfoundment at a bestial black face, framed in a thick bush of blacker whiskers, pressed against the screen wire of the window by his side. A long, sloping, wrinkled forehead; heavy, overhanging brows; small, close-set, glaring eyes; wide flaring nostrils; thick drooling lips; and a mass of frizzled black hair.

"De day hab come an' Ah is heah." The voice was hollow, ghostly.

Then from the next room the wild babble:

"Pink or yaller, green or red,
I gets 'em all from me little bed."

"Ee-yhowh!"

Wham!

The last concussion was the signal for a bedlam of discordant shouts through which pierced the locomotive's endless wail.

"Meester Leselee, Meester Leselee! What eez it?"

"De day ob de Lawd hab come an' Kherrist is risen."

"Oo-oo-ah, Oo-oo-ah, OO-ah-Oo-oo-ah-a-a."

"Purple giraffes and pink ele-phants,
Yaller crocodiles, shiverin' hants,
The dangdest managerie I ever did see,
Snakes, baboons, and a chim-pan-zee."

"Ee-yhowh!"

"Oo-oo-ah, Oo-oo-ah-Oo-ah."

Wham!

Dan Leslie rose up on his elbow and groped for his gun-belt at the foot of his bed. It should have been hanging there, but he did not find it.

"Oo-oo-ah, Oo-oo-ah, Oo-oo-oo-ah," wailed the engine, speeding nearer through the night.

"Hi, Dan, com-mere quick! There's a blue tiger sittin' on the footta ma bed! Ee-yhowh!"

Wham!

"Meester Leselee, O-oh, Meester Leselee!'

"Petuh, de Lawd done called yo'. Come unto de Son ob Man."

"I got 'im Dan! I blowed 'im into th' middle of next week!"

Two clusters of claw-like black digits pressed through the screen wire and ripped. The demoniacal black head, thrust forward from wide sloping shoulders atop a squat body, pushed through the window and hung slobbering over the bed.

"Petuh, de Jeggement day hab come. Does yo' heah me?"

Dan Leslie recoiled from the glaring eyes and drawing his body together drove his bare feet through the clutching hands into the apparition's face. He recoiled again instantly from the feel of hard frizzly hair and greasy skin on his soles and sprang out of bed. The Thing toppled off of the porch.

"Ger-rr-r," came an animal-like growl from the yard, as Leslie crashed heavily over a chair searching frantically for his gun.

"Ee-yhowh!"

Wham! "Shoot 'um, Dan!"

Wham!

"Meester Leselee, *what's* ze matter?"

"Oo-oo, Oo-oo-ah-a-a," wailed the locomotive; coming nearer still.

Dan Leslie picked himself up from the floor and hurled his body at the black Thing bursting through the door. He caught just a glimpse of a broad squat body with low-hanging hands, flaming eyes and slavering lips drawn back from huge teeth; and grappled with it.

"Ah is gottchu, Petuh! Yo' time hab come;" it mouthed in his ear and clutched him in a bone-cracking hug. Leslie twisted and squirmed and burying his head in the bush of hair pushed outward with all his strength.

"The debbil done gottchu, Petuh; 'cause yo' would no heah de Lawd."

"Ee-yhowh!"

"Ee-yhowh!"

Wham!

"Dan, Dan; the devil's got me!"

"Al Diablo! Cristo Santo! Mejor vamos a ver que pasa."

Dan Leslie relaxed his futile straining suddenly, and butted.

"Gerr-rump!"

Thump—and he was rolling on the floor of the porch, straining every muscle to get on top of the Thing that held him and hold it down. An acrid animal stench filled his nostrils and sweat blinded his eyes.

Bang! His head hit the wall with a force that jarred him to his heels, a flash of glaring light shot through his brain, and he went limp.

"Ee-ee-yhowh, Dan! I'm in hell 'an burning up. Come get me out!"

"Yo' is mah meat 'an I'se guinna eat yo' alive," slobbered the Thing holding Leslie helpless against the wall, and clamping down on his thumb ground it between his teeth.

"Oo-oo-wee," howled Dan, revived by the pain; and finding a thick ear against his lips he bit on it and chewed.

"Ger-r-rowh!" growled the Thing and released the thumb.

"Oo-oo, Oo-oo-ah," blew the engine, very near.

"Dan! Hi, Dan! There's a lion on muh chest!" Dan braced his feet back against the wall and heaved. Over and over the bodies rolled and off of the edge of the porch.

"Cristo Santo! Que diablos es——"

Whang, whang-whang-whang! rang a revolver four times. Three men were running up the steps when the struggling bodies bumped down. One leaped backward into the yard shooting as he sprang. Two were knocked sprawling, and rolled out on the grass.

"Hey! Quit that an' hul-lup me str-rangle this—gul-lup ger-r-r, ger-rump."

"Agarr-ralos!" whooped the dancing man with the gun. One rolled over on to his hands and feet and catapulted himself head foremost into the mass. The other sprang up into the air from a squat and landed with his feet on top.

"Sep-parelos!" screeched the man hopping around on the edge of the tumbling mix-up, looking for an opening to bring down his gun on a head.

"O! Fatha', what hart thou?"

"Ouch, leggo you——"

"——! *Sueltame*——"

Grunts, howls, groans, and panting curses.

"Dan! Hi, Dan! For ——'s sake commere!"

"Oooo-ooo-oo-oo," bellowed the engine, rounding the curve.

A shaft of white light lighting up the house and yard in a blinding glare, hung for a second on the struggle on the ground and swung off, bringing out the heavy mats of bananas in bold relief, as if painted on a black background. The staccato puffing of the exhaust shut off short and with hissing steam and grinding brakes the engine slid past and bumped to a clanking stop. A white man and a black man dropped off and came running into the yard. The white man carried a revolver and a flashlight, the black man swung a heavy wrench.

"What tha blue blazes——"

Crunch-whang! The jig-dancer's gun exploded once and flew from his outflung hand as he sank into himself under the force of the blow on his skull and slumped to the ground.

"Lawd me God-suh——"

Crack! the wrench fell, and one body rolled loose from the mess and subsided.

"Who tha——"

Two heavy boots drove into the body of another, bringing forth a deep gasping grunt; and that one rolled out on the grass and lay twitching and groaning.

The white man flashed on his light and stooped over the remaining pair, poised to strike; and the black man drew back his wrench for another blow. Dan Leslie showed up on top of a heaving, grunting, black body with madly glaring eyes and foaming lips; his legs wrapped around its middle squeezing it between his knees, his elbows driven into its ribs under the armpits and squeezing with all his power, his hand gripping a pair of lobeless ears, and thumping its head against the hard ground with all his might.

The Thing underneath kicked and strained with its feet, arching and twisting its body, and thumping its knees harmlessly into Leslie's back; its hands clawing at Leslie's hands, neck and face, which were buried in the thick mass of the Thing's wiry whiskers. The white man and the black man stepped around together from opposite sides of the struggling bodies, and *crunch, crack!* the revolver and wrench came down together. The black body underneath arched up on head and heels and Leslie rolled off.

It twitched and quivered a time or two and then lay still, breathing in great whistling gasps. Leslie rolled over once and lay on his back, flopping and panting, opening and shutting his mouth, swallowing air in gulps, like a fish out of water.

"Ee-ee-yhowh, Dan!" *Thump, thud, bang, crash!*

"Bose!" came from inside the house. The American conductor and the West Indian engineer jumped. The Panamanian *Comandante* sat up, rubbing his head, and looked dazedly around. The two natified negro policemen flopped and twisted and came back to life. Dan Leslie squirmed and gurgled, making motions and trying to talk. The wheezing, slavering black man twitched and jerked, but lay prone sprawled out on the grass.

"What tha——"

"Lawd hab mussie——"

"*Qe-que, do-done, como*——"

"*Hay me pan-za, hay-hay*——"

"*OO-ee, mi pobre-za, Oh-oh*——"

Gurgle, gasp, choke.

"Whee-ee-ee, ger-rr-whee— Kher-rist whee-ee——"

"Oh when I di-ie, do-ant bur-ry me at-ta-all,
Just pic-kul ma bra-i-nes, in a-al-ka-hall-l,
Putta bot-tal uh bo-oo-ze, at me head an' feet
An' this body o' min-i-ne, will al-ways ke-eep.
Will...............alway............keep."

"——, that's Hutch! He mustta fell outta bed."

"Misto Hutchison de Timekeeper, suh?"

"Meester Hootchizon very bolo. What heet me?"

"*Que demonios?*"

"*Que diablos?*"

"Tie this crazy nigger up 'fore he comes back to life—" whee-ee-ze— "He thinks he's Christ, an' —— near killed me—" whoo-whee-eeze— "Then go get that —— fool Hutch 'fore he kills himself." Whoo-whee. "He's got th' willies an' he's got mah gun. Lookout 'im."

"Ar-right, Dan. Take it easy 'till yuh get yer wind back. Not hurt, are you?"

"No."

The *Comandante* clambered to his feet and following his lead the two policemen, stood up.

"——! but my head do hurt bad."

One man went for the rope and the other picked up the *Comandante's* gun and handed it to him.

"Please, suh, len' me yo' light to look fo' mah club."

Leslie got slowly to his feet and stood swaying weakly, mopping his face with the torn end of his pajama coat.

"Whew! Good thing yuh got here when yuh did. I was just about all in. By the holy jumping cat-fish, say! I've been *manador* in charge of this razzle-dazzle banana farm for ten months—and most a th' time been kickin' 'bout things bein' sa-slow—nothing happenin' t'break th' monotony. By ——, 'nough's happened in th' last ten minutes to last me for th' next ten years."

"From the looks o' things when we got here I'll say there did, Dan. If what had been going on for ten minutes——"

"EE-ee-yhowh, Dan!"

Thump, crash, *bang!*

THE BORGIAS

by F. R. Buckley

OF ALL the names in the vast rogues' gallery of history, none shines with such sinister effulgence as that of Borgia. The characteristic of the Borgias—Alexander VI, Cæsare, and Lucrezia—which has made the greatest appeal to the popular imagination, is their ability as plotters and poisoners. They are credited with the most complex stratagems and with innumerable murders, committed with a most artistic subtlety and variety of method. The usual impression is that an endless procession of cardinals, dukes and princes dined with, drank the health of, or accepted rings from the fatal family, and died weeks later without visible symptoms of foul play. The legend is so terrible that it seems almost a pity it is not true.

However, the facts are that Lucrezia, supposedly the blackest figure of the three, was really nothing more than a rather immoral, and certainly very stupid woman with no provable criminal record at all. Cæsare, her brother, was simply a mediocre freelance soldier, raised to dukedoms by the power of his patron, the Pope. His outstanding murders—those of his brother, his brother-in-law, and Astore Manfredi—were rough, vulgar affairs of cold steel in the hands of servants.

Alexander VI. seems to have been the only poisoner in the family; and the poison he chiefly affected, when diagnosed in the light of contemporary accounts of the deaths of his victims, is a disappointment; merely an arsenious solution comparable to modern rat-poison.

There is no authentic support for the fable about his presentation of rings with small sharp fangs on the inside, which scratched the victim and caused lingering death; there is, in any case, no poison suitable for administration in just this way except curare, which is even today exceedingly difficult to obtain and which was then unknown.

The only really picturesque mode of assassination in vogue anywhere near the period, in fact, is one mentioned by Benvenuto Cellini; poisoning by the administration of powdered diamond. Crushed glass, as is now well known, does not deserve the reputation it once enjoyed; nor, according to Cellini, do other crushed jewels produce the genuine diamond effect, their fractures being comparatively blunt and their material soft. The diamond, however, powders into innumerable needles with points of extreme fineness, which do not blunt, and which gradually penetrate the walls of the stomach.

So it seems that the long-derided story about lingering deaths from one dose of Borgia poison, may have a foundation in fact. Alexander had plenty of foes to whom he wished all the agony possible—and plenty of diamonds.

Pards

A Five-Part Story

Part IV

by

Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Homesteader," "The Bush Lopers," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form:

FRANK ELLIS woke up one bright morning in California Gulch to find himself a total failure. Through the winter of 1862 he had trailed from one holding to another until the gold mining season was at a close. He was penniless, and he had a sister back east who believed him a great success. There was nothing left for him to do but take a job over the lunch counter of the Great Western Hotel, under the hand of George Skillings, boss.

As he was serving his first meal to a group of miners, traders, and mine employees, he unconsciously burst into a plaintive song.

"Stop that —— racket," the boss roared.

From that time on he was the "Singing Pilgrim."

The Pilgrim became a drawing card. Nate Goss, the gambler; "Rabbit," the Indian, doomed to death by his tribe on a charge of killing a brother tribesman; "Ancient Days," an old-time placer miner; "Bones," a man with a delusion of great prehistoric beasts in the gulches—all fell into the lure of the Pilgrim's voice.

"Whip King," reputed to be the best wagon-train boss between the River and the coast, arrived in the gulch with a startling crack of his monstrous whip. He had no special destination, no special enemies, and he cared little for firearms. But he proved to be the friend of many restless men who fought constantly. Many was the time that his long lash sent men, armed with six-shooters, cowering in the corner.

With the season almost ended and too many men finding almost no gold, things in California Gulch became a bit thick. Goss had a fight with Charlie Dodge, the monte gambler, as a result of unfair play, and finally the Pilgrim fought with his boss. The fight itself was inconsequential, but a threat loomed in the background when the Pilgrim swore vengeance.

That night Skillings, the boss, was found with a knife in his heart, and the Singing Pilgrim was missing from California Gulch.

EXAMINATION of Skillings' effects brought to light counterfeit money amounting to twenty thousand dollars. The mob, almost in a frenzy, shouted—

"Hang the Pilgrim! Hang the Singing Pilgrim!"

And added to this they accused Goss of being implicated in the counterfeiting gang, giving him a chance of leaving town immediately or risking the circumstances if he stayed. He left.

With the aid of Rabbit, the Pilgrim stole away in the night, an innocent outcast. For many days they wandered, until the Pilgrim lost the Rabbit when pursued by the Utes, the tribe of Indians to which the Rabbit belonged. Certain death threatened the Pilgrim. He was saved miraculously by the reappearance of Rabbit, whom the tribe worship as a god, calling him the "Walking Dead Man."

An outcast by the name of Lomson, who has affiliated himself with the tribe, also came into the camp. Trouble began anew. By mistake the Pilgrim and Lomson went into the sacred medicine tent to smoke a pipe of tobacco out of the rain. The Indians found them there, and in his excitement, the Pilgrim put a small idol in his pocket which he had in his hand at the time of the Indians' entrance.

The discovery of the loss of the idol put the camp in a turmoil, the Pilgrim was again accused and threatened with death. Court was held, and Rabbit promised that the idol would be restored with the release of the Pilgrim. He was unsuccessful, and only through great stealth and cunning did the Pilgrim finally escape from the camp of his enemies.

BUT his escape only threw him into more violent hands. Exhausted from travel and want of food, the Pilgrim came to the cabin of Jonathan Leaper, an outlaw, who offered to keep him over night. Bill Waggle, also spending the night there, recognized the Pilgrim, and was turned out.

The reason for this came to light the next morning when Leaper robbed the Pilgrim, bound him to a

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"Pards," copyright, 1925, by Hugh Pendexter.

mule and turned them both loose on the wild, rocky passes.

After a long period of intense suffering, the Pilgrim was rescued by United States Marshal Farnham, and together they went back to the cabin and captured Leaper.

During this time, Goss arrived in Denver where he met Whip King, Waggle.

Before the Pilgrim reached the city, his sister, Annie, arrived from the East unexpectedly. When the Pilgrim arrived, he was sought out by Goss, who made all arrangements for sister and brother to get out of town before the Pilgrim should be discovered by the deputies. Whip King offered his ranch, several miles from the city, and the Pilgrim and his sister were guided there.

Goss, following them, strayed from the main trail, and came to De Longe's cabin where four men were playing cards. He was permitted to join in the game, and soon had most of the winnings. Enraged by defeat, Burt Damon cheated and was accused by his pal, "Snap." Damon stabbed Snap and started for Goss, who shot him through the head. Goss collected the money he had won, and keeping himself covered from De Longe and the other men, went out into the night.

CHAPTER VIII

DOWN THE RIVER ROAD

DOWN a hog-back, where the upturned sandstone had resisted erosion, Goss rode to Cañon City. The town appeared to be practically deserted as the gambler entered and dismounted in front of Hall's place. The proprietor was cleaning out the saloon. He dropped the broom and warmly greeted:

"Glad to see you alive, mister. Do you know I was afraid last night you was gunning for those wild men up Grape Creek? Yes, sir. And you've got so much stuff inside here you'll need a mule to pack it along. Ancient said last night you'd bought the ranch. Thats where you're going?"

Goss was displeased to learn Ancient Days had told about selling the ranch. He muttered something about an old fool and admitted he was riding to the ranch. Hall misunderstood him and insisted:

"Nothing foolish about buying it. Any property along the river between here and Pueblo will double a man's money in a few years. That is, if this war ever stops. You can't get your stuff down there without a mule. I'll lend you one and have one of the Mexican boys pack it."

"That's kind of you. I'll make it right."

"Just fetch or send the mule back sometime. That'll make it right, I'll have the stuff packed in no time."

"Hasty and Ancient quit town? Or sleeping off their drunk?"

Hall smiled reminiscently.

"They did have a high old time and made enough racket for a hundred returned miners. Seemed like old times. Joe Hasty is still as a mouse till he gets waked up. Ancient always makes the eagle scream. They put all the boys to bed and half an hour ago they was wandering about the streets trying to find somebody to drink with. One of the boys said a scar-faced feller started to enter the north end of the town where they was dancing around a bonfire and shooting off guns, but turned back after taking one look."

Goss felt relieved. He had no wish to meet DeLouge again. Two lives were sufficient as a price for his night's winnings. Hall was running on.

"Instead of sleeping off their liquor those two old hellions are trying to wake up the new assayer. Got a hen on, I s'pose."

Goss inquired the location of the assayer's office and learned it was in the second story of the post office building, where Billy Gamble set up the first billiard table in Cañon City. He left his horse hitched in front of the saloon. On reaching the building he found Gabriel Bowen laboriously cutting a pile of firewood while Ancient Days and Joe Hasty sat at one side and watched him.

"You fellers ought to help with this job, seeing how you're interested in my ore," said Bowen as he paused to wipe the sweat from his face.

"Sell us a share in your worthless mine and we'll share in the hard work," replied Ancient Days.

"It's your ore the feller's assaying," added Hasty lazily. "Ain't our fault if he refused to test it unless you cut the wood.

"Then if it's my ore what are you two hanging round for?" warmly demanded Bowen.

"If it's any good we're going to dog you and snuggle in as close to your discovery claim as we can," frankly informed Hasty.

Ancient Days observing Goss, let out a whoop and jumped to his feet and ran forward eager to shake hands with the gambler.

"You oughter stayed with us last night," he earnestly declared. "Never was money put to such good account. Every son was b'iling, but Joe'n me held the fort."

"Any of the six hundred left?"

"Well, some. Thought you'd lit out. Got some stuff to be 'sayed?"

Goss shook his head and explained—

"Wanted to see you and tell you not to mention a word about my buying the ranch."

Ancient scratched his head and confessed:

"Seems to be pretty well known in town. You oughter warned me at the go-in."

"If you meet young Ellis or his sister, you're not to mention it. Don't forget."

With this belated warning Goss would have turned back to the saloon if not for the sudden appearance of a disheveled head at a second story window, with the owner calling down—

"How much of that wood's left?"

Goss blinked in surprize on beholding Euclid. Euclid failed to recognize the gambler. Bowen picked up the ax and answered:

"Five minutes will finish it. Well nigh hogged-out now."

"Very good. In six minutes I'll be ready to report on your ore."

And the eccentric young man banged down the window and disappeared from view.

Goss entered the building and mounted to the second floor and entered the billiard hall. Euclid, with back to the door, was seated and had his heels resting on the table. He was smoking a big pipe, and without turning his head he called out:

"No use snooping. Won't do at all. The wood must be finished to the last stick."

The sound of the ax in the street told him the chopping was being continued, and he dropped his feet to the floor and impatiently swung about to face the intruder. With a cry of delight he jumped from the chair and stretched out both hands.

"——! But I'm glad to see you. Goss! When did you arrive? How long you going to stay?"

And he advanced and shook the gambler's two hands warmly.

"Pulling out very soon. Probably shall go to Pueblo."

"Goss' first thought was to mention Ellis and his sister, but he changed his mind. Euclid was a wanderer and might spread information widely if he heard men inquiring about the Singing Pilgrim.

"How long are you staying here?"

"Just long enough to get a bread-and-butter stake. Waiting for the men to come in from the winter and hoping they'll have lots of work for me. By the middle of this month we'll have our first snow in the hills. That ought to drive them in. I'm getting tired of assaying. Trouble is there's not enough surface mines. Not enough rainfall. Little water means only a little wash. A slight wash means few surface diggings. We have only an inch of rain here while they're having a foot in California. I've been trying to perfect a rain-making device that'll drench down these mountains more thoroughly. Just one little nubbin of an obstacle stands between me and success."

"I musn't keep you from your work. Just wanted to say howd'y."

And the gambler glanced at the black specimens on the table.

"Oh, that's finished long ago. I'm to get three dollars and the wood worked up."

"Poor ——! Pays and works just to learn he hasn't found anything," murmured Goss.

Euclid grinned broadly and picked up a piece of the ore and informed:

"He's found a mine of argentiferous galena. He can't melt it down and make it into bullets because it's chuck full of silver. I haven't overcharged him."

"That's good. See you again soon if you stay on here. I shan't be down the valley long."

And with another shake of the hand Goss turned to depart. Then he remembered, and offered—

"I'll lend you a hundred if you're in cap."

As his hand reached for his pocket Euclid smiled wryly and refused:

"No more. I'm working in a bit of a pinch but I'll get clear soon. There's the horse you bought for me. I'm still owing for that. Sit down. We haven't talked any yet. Wait a minute."

"He ran to the window and called down—

"Don't come here till I give the word. Just at the critical point of my process."

Closing the window he confided to Goss:

"This business is too slow. Another season I shall quit assaying and try prospecting. If I could get in touch with Lomsom when he's away from his Utes I might make a dicker with him to work some of his secret placers."

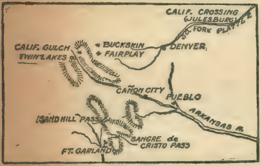
"Keep away from Lomsom. He's bad medicine," warned Goss.

Euclid grinned cheerfully and reminded:

"Remember how those red —— took on because I smoked the wrong pipe? Makes me laugh to think about it. Then you two fellows had to ride their sacred ponies! ——! But I've waked up in the night to laugh about it! Then came the storm. Listen, it would take several days to talk ourselves out."

"Some other time. I must be going."

He hastened down to the street as Euclid called from the window for Bowen to come and receive the report. He halted Joe Hasty and Ancient Days in the doorway and held them while Bowen hurried up the stairs.



"This is stretching friendship, Goss!" bawled Ancient.

"Listen to me," sternly commanded the gambler. "Not a word to the assayer or anyone else about Ellis being on the ranch. As to that ore, the assayer told me it's heavy with silver."

"—— a'mighty!" exploded Ancient.

And wresting himself free he ran nimbly up the stairs after the weary Bowen.

At the store Goss found the Mexican finishing his job of packing the mule; the load all but concealed the animal from sight. Mounting his horse he started down the valley to rejoin his friends at the ranch.

ANNIE ELLIS critically surveyed the two rooms she had swept and and scrubbed and then joined her brother out of doors. The wonder of the day and the grandeur of the western skyline caused her to forget worries. Her first impression of the ranch had been its restful quiet compared with Denver and the hurried flight south.

This miracle of a morning had confirmed her belief that she was out of the world of troubles. But as her gaze wandered to her brother, busy at a pile of logs, her methodical mind made a more careful inventory of the situation. And loneliness and hopelessness assailed her as she was compelled to admit that their roof was borrowed and that the few furnishings brought from Cañon City had been provided by a professional gambler.

Her brother ceased work and called to her—

"Nate ought to be here soon."

She slowly advanced to the logs and replied—

"I'm thinking he ought not to be here at all."

"Good land! After all he's done for us?" he cried, staring at her reprovingly.

"That's just it, Frank. We're indebted to him too much already. Of course we'll pay it back sometime."

"But that's nothing to do with him not being here at all."

"We must pay back what we owe, but as to his living here, one of us—". She did not wish to hurt her brother's feelings.

Ellis impatiently reminded:

"You don't like gambling, Annie. But you don't want him here, the one place where he can't gamble."

"Oh, I know he's been kind to us," she agreed. "Yet it isn't for us to make him over. You know what folks back home would say. We weren't brought up to think highly of gamblers."

"I think highly of this gambler," stoutly insisted Ellis. "If he played cards and lost his money we'd call him a dupe. But because he plays cards—well, he's a gambler! At least he's a success, and that's more'n I can say of myself."

"There's no comparison, Frank," she began.

But he quickly cut in, and almost roughly:

"See here, Annie, that man saved my life. He's a better man than I am. He stood by me in California Gulch when I was plumb discouraged. He helped to save me from the Utes. If he's good enough to do that he ought to be good enough to eat some of the food his money has bought."

Her face went white, then crimson.

"That's true, Frank. I won't say another word. But I can't help my feelings."

"No one can. But try not to show them too plainly, Annie."

He turned and stared up the road and added—

"He'll be coming any minute now."

"I'll be very nice," she promised, smiling with her lips.

But after she had listlessly entered the house her young face was tragic with despair.

Goss arrived shortly before the noon hour. Ellis' welcoming shout told his sister of the gambler's return several minutes before he rode up to the ranch with the heavily laden mule. The girl hurried to the door and greeted Goss cordially, and was pained to discover she was resenting him more in his role of benefactor than in his vocation as a gambler. She was unsparingly honest with herself and strongly condemned this phase of pride even while unable to oust it. Goss was quite transformed. Ellis had never seen him wear such a merry countenance.

"I've fetched some seeds and a few odds and ends, ma'am," Goss explained, his bearing becoming a bit diffident. "You'll have planting weather by March. You can get some hens and a cow from one of your neighbors."

"March!" she repeated. "But the old man who owns this place. I've been worrying about his coming and not liking to find us here. I feel very uneasy. Surely, he'll want to come here before next March."

Goss' buoyant confidence returned as he heartily assured:

"He won't come. I saw him at Cañon City and talked with him about your staying here. He's tickled to death. House will go to rack and ruin if not occupied. He's planning a new prospecting trip and you won't see him for many months, if at all. Then again, he's under obligations to Frank. Your brother helped him up in the mountains. He never had any use for this place. Wouldn't plant a turnip to keep himself from starving. He's a placer man. Give me a hand with the pack, Frank."

The two quickly relieved the mule of the heavy load and Goss filled his arms and approached the door, explaining:

"You can get more seeds when you find just what you want to put in. Butter's dollar a pound. Eggs dollar'n half a dozen. Corn's fetching ten cents a pound. And everything else in proportion. If the Plains Indians follow Minnesota's example and go on the rampage, everything you can raise will bring a big price."

"A dollar and a half for eggs!" she exclaimed, her thoughts darting back to Martinsville prices. "Why, a farm is the real gold mine out here!"

Her brother quickly amended:

"A gold mine for the three of us. If we can get some stock and put in some crops we'll have five-ounce diggings in no time. And it's high time you settled down to something steady, Nate."

Goss flashed a glance at the girl and knew she was not sharing her brother's enthusiasm. He lightly told Ellis:

"It isn't my game, Frank. I've planned to go down to Pueblo for a while. Don't know how long I shall stay; as long as I like it."

Ellis' face became wobegone. His sister urged:

"You'd better turn farmer, Mr. Goss. You have as much right here as we have."

"You have every right here, ma'am, along of what your brother did for the owner, Ancient Days. I'm just one of those fellows who drift by and says howdy. Ancient never will plow land unless sure he can turn up ounce nuggets. I'd be out of place on a ranch. It's a ranch after you strike Nebraska, coming from the east, I've been told. I'd disgrace you all by forgetting to call a collection of horses a band, and all cattle owned by you as a herd, and part of a herd as a bunch. And I'd never remember that sheep are always in flocks. Probably take me several years to adjust those names right."

"You're trying to be funny," grumbled Ellis. "I don't see why you should pull out. It would be so much more cheerful if you stayed. We'd form a partnership. We have the use of the ranch because Ancient doesn't want it and because he feels indebted to me. That's my share. You've brought in a big stake of grub; that'll be your share. Annie does the housework; that's her share.

"We'll keep accounts and raise lots of vegetables. That leaves the money I owe you to come out of my share. We'll make more than you can make at the tables. Besides, card playing for a living won't always be flush money in Colorado. You've got to turn to something else sometime, why not now?"

"Your brother talks like a preacher and a bang-up lawyer, ma'am," Goss laughingly told the Ellis girl. "I'm thinking his talk will assay top-high at that."

"I haven't any doubt that some other

occupation would be better for you," she slowly replied.

"And none better than farming," urged Ellis.

"Of course. None better than farming," she agreed.

"It's good of you to want to snatch me from the burning even if I keep in the fire," Goss gravely told them. "But my plans are made and I'll trot along to Pueblo and look the ground over. Send the mule back to George Hall in Cañon City by some of your neighbors."

"I feel badly to have you pay for our supplies," the girl helplessly insisted.

"It's nothing that concerns you. Just a matter between Frank and me. When you're selling cabbages for several dollars apiece and weighing out corn on gold scales, I'll be rapping at the door with my hat in my hand to ask for some cold victuals. Now I must see to my horse."

Laughing over his prophecy he deposited his armful of packages inside the door and hurried to picket his horse.

The noon meal was eaten with genuine enjoyment by Ellis and with false gaiety by Goss. The girl found the gambler's presence a constant reminder of her dependence on him even for food; and the Ellis family were strangers to donations. All her eastern prejudices were aroused. Yet personally there was much about Goss to admire. He was scarcely her senior, and was very boyish and genuine as he permitted free play to his sense of humor. He was generous. He had been kind to her brother, kind to her.

She feared he suspected he was not wanted and she endeavored her best to make him feel welcome. But she was the product of generations of prim, set ideas of respectability, and her mind was ever unwillingly returning the verdict he was outside the pale. The more she essayed to be nice to him the more readily did his keen mind perceive the truth behind her manner. In the terminology of his craft he quickly concluded—

"She's over-playing her hand."

Only his ability to dissemble covered up his sense of loss.

Ellis persisted in urging his friend to stay. Goss laughingly ignored the invitation. Ellis warmly repeated his warning that gambling as a trade could lead to nothing permanent. When he appealed to his sister on this point her acquiescence was prompt and positive. But used to reading inscrutable men, Goss found her to be transparent. The inexorable fact remained she did not relish his presence. His pride was as great as hers, as was his capacity for being hurt, for like her he was young.

* * *

IMMEDIATELY after dinner he announced he must ride on. The girl demurred and her brother expostulated. Goss laughingly continued his preparations. Ellis followed him to his horse, still insisting. The gambler sharply broke in on him with the inquiry—

"Still keep your hand-gun handy?"

"Hanging inside by the door, but I sha'n't need it."

"Probably not. But queer characters drift up and down this road. You keep it loaded and handy. This country is perfectly safe for a woman if she has a man to protect her."

"I'll protect her," grimly assured Ellis.

"Oh, the chances are you two won't be troubled. At the most you'll only have to make a show of force. If some bully should decide he could scare you off and jump this place he'd likely try it. I'll be riding up later to see how you're getting along. Get acquainted with your neighbors. So long, ma'am. I know you and your brother will make this place blossom like the rose. Fruit trees will do well here I'm told."

Annie left the doorway and joined them, her face serious and troubled. She stood by his stirrup and shook hands and said:

"Everything is so mixed up, Mr. Goss. You ought not to be going away to gamble. You ought to earn some money in another way and buy a place and settle down. Frank and I ought to be making our own way somewhere instead of living on borrowed property. I'm afraid my worries have made me appear unmindful for what you've done for Frank and me. But I do mind it, really. I want you to know that."

"Listen, young lady," Goss told her. "Everything will be perfectly all right. You can remain here as long as you like. The owner wouldn't stay here if the place was covered with hens, all laying eggs of purest gold. You've had all your hard luck; it's all behind you. In the spring you can arrange to buy this place for a small price if you care to."

"I don't think I could live here. We belong back east."

Goss stared down at her thoughtfully, then offered:

"If you're mortal keen to go back it can be fixed. You don't have to wait. But you'll have to go by the Platte route and start mighty soon."

"I won't go back to Denver to catch a wagon train," bluntly spoke up Ellis. "They'll still be looking for me there."

"We must keep away from Denver," agreed the girl. "We'll get along here till next spring anyway."

"You mustn't give up too much on account of Frank," said Goss. "It isn't your fault if he's drawn a poor hand. He's a man. He can shift for himself. The most important thing in the valley of the Arkansas is to see that you're outfitted right. We'll leave it this way. If you have a sudden hankering to go he can get word to me at Pueblo and I'll fix it. Maybe you'll feel easier in your mind, ma'am, by remembering you can pull out any time for the River. It's like being in a room with the door open. Trouble comes when the door is closed and locked on the outside."

"We'll stay through the winter," she said. "You've done too much for us as it is. What I intended to say was to thank you, not to complain."

"Forget about it," was his terse advice. "Your brother and I have had some rare times together. We owe lots to each. You just happened along. You don't get any cards. You're just looking on. I won't quit Pueblo without letting you know. Send word if anything goes wrong."

With a nod and a smile he turned his horse down the river road. And as they watched him gallop out of sight both felt they were very much alone.

"Nate's a good fellow," Ellis aggressively declared. "Even if he is a gambler he's a good fellow. One of the best."

"Of course, dear. And all the greater pity he should be a gambler. We'll never forget he's been a good friend to both of us. Now while I'm doing the dishes why not burn the untidy pile of brush near the road?"

She hurried in doors to hide her homesickness. Ellis proceeded to light the brush that represented Ancient Days' only effort to improve the ranch after he had built another room on to the house. As Ellis was moodily watching the crackling flames a man rode up and slid from the saddle and greeted:

"How are you, young man? I'm Jesse Frazer. One of your neighbors. Squatting on Ancient's place, I take it."

Frazer's manner was genial and his face kindly and, although only thirty years old, he impressed Ellis as being much older and one who could be confided in. Ellis explained much of his troubles, omitting only his fear of the law. Frazer listened and nodded sympathetically, but rather annoyed the young man by kicking the burning brush apart and stamping out the fire.

"That's fine," said Frazer as the young man finished his recital of hopes and problems. "I can outfit you with some hens and tell you lots I've learned by experience. Yes, I can let you have a cow and by spring you probably can arrange to pay for the critter. Maybe I can let you have two so you can make butter to sell. I'm glad to find a young man who knows growing gold in the shape of crops is better than digging it.

"Caught a glimpse of the little woman through the window. She moves 'round like she was a real worker. Colorado needs workers besides those who dig holes in the ground and paw over rocks. After the placer gold's all been found and gambling gets to be out of fashion this river country will be a fruit country. Coal all the way to Pueblo. Gabriel Bowen has found some oil wells.

"Stock raising is beginning to grow. After the war's ended and the Injuns simmer down, this will be a likely country. Young men will be coming back from the war keen to work. Fine lands for all, between the Platte and the Cache-a-la-Poudre, above and below Denver and all along the Arkansas. Think I'll step in and speak to the little woman."

Ellis began heaping up the scattered brush, but Frazer halted him, saying:

"Don't think I'd burn that now. Some Arapahos and Cheyennes a few miles down stream stopped the settlers from burning brush a few days ago. They believed the settlers were signaling to the Utes. Let it be till spring, or till the Injuns have cleared out."

They entered the ranch-house, and after a few minutes the girl felt as if she had always known Frazer. He talked enthusiastically of his one place and insisted she and her brother come over and visit for a few days and bring back some hens and a cow or two.

"You'll like my wife. She's the first white woman in this part of Colorado. Robert Middleton's wife was the first in Cañon City. And Anson Rudd's child was the first male child born in Cañon City. But I mustn't run on."

Yet he did for more than an hour and filled his eager listeners with courage and ambition. His rambling talk supplied what they had lacked, vision. He appeared to notice everything and, on leaving, asked about the mule, if it did not belong to Hall at Cañon City. Ellis explained and Frazer promptly offered to return the animal on his next trip to town.

After he had departed Annie burst into tears and told her brother:

"Thank heaven, he's human! I've been wanting to cry for a long time. Don't mind me, dear. Sign I'm feeling better. Think of him and his wife coming down here and making a home when Denver was the nearest place where he could get supplies! And his walking to Cañon City when he heard a wagon train was there, and paying eighteen dollars for a sack of flour and bringing it home on his shoulder! He says he'll soon have a big orchard of two thousand trees, apples, pears, plums, and all kinds of berries. Why, Frank, he's even planning to keep bees! And two years ago he started in with a crooked stick for a plow!"

"If he can do all that we at least can stick it out till spring," declared her brother. "We felt all alone in the world and he popped in. And if here ain't more neighbors!"

He opened the door to greet the horseman he had glimpsed through the window, and instead of one man beheld three. His first glance at the foremost rider told him they were not farmers. Like Goss, he read recklessness in the scarred face of DeLouge. The long black hair and heavy gun in the belt proclaimed him anything except a tiller of the soil.

DeLouge rode up to the door and shaking his hair back removed his ragged slouch hat and bowed low to the startled girl and in a soft, musical voice explained:

"Just riding around and looking for a man who came down this way. Calls himself 'Nathan Goss, square gambler.' We're keen to meet him."

Seth and Snap licked their lips and edged their mounts forward to hear Ellis reply.

Ellis, inwardly perturbed by the contrast between the man's suave voice and savagery of his black eyes, was given no opportunity to answer. His sister, standing at his shoulder, stepped forward. DeLouge, bareheaded, bowed again and began—

"I was asking your husband, madame ——"

"My brother. I heard you ask for a man called Goss," she broke in. "We've seen nothing of the friend you're seeking."

"A new acquaintance. Scarcely a friend as yet, miss," murmured DeLouge. "If Mr. Goss should happen along this way I'd take it kindly if you'd mention to him that DeLouge had inquired for him."

"But, look here, Cap'n," called out Seth.

DeLouge turned and stared at his companion, who suddenly lost his voice and backed his horse toward the road. Snap followed his example. DeLouge swept his glance about the premises, smiled slightly as he looked down into the girl's flushed face, then with another bow wheeled and rode after his friends.

The three galloped down the river road. Annie Ellis clutched her brother's arm and looked after them with a great dread in her eyes.

"Frank," she whispered, "they're hunting him!"

"How do you know that?" he muttered. "You told them he hadn't been here."

"I lied because I knew they were hunting him. That horrible man with the pretty voice! Such a deadly man! How polite he was to me! But how quickly he would kill, and smile as he killed."

"Good ——, Annie! You're guessing at this. Goss knows many men of many types. If I believed what you're saying I'd be riding to get word to Nate."

"You would never catch up with them. If you did they wouldn't let you pass. Goss is far on his way. They can't find him till they reach Pueblo. There's nothing we can do. Oh, if only folks out here were all kindly and neighborly like Mr. Frazer!"

She abruptly darted into the house and her brother knew she was shedding tears of bitterness this time. He believed she wished to be alone. He waited, and at last she came to the door, her small face composed.

"I'm all right now, Frank. I've made myself believe he'll come to no harm."

But he had been thinking. He insisted—

"They couldn't know that Goss had been here."

"The mule told them that much," she replied. "I saw the man's eyes light up when he saw the mule. They learned at Cañon City he had started down this way with a mule loaded with provisions. They're hunting him."

Her brother believed she had the right of it. He had forgotten about the mule contentedly grazing near the house. He groaned—

"It's awful not to be able to make a move to help him."

"I'm making myself believe he'll come to no harm from them."

"Of course he won't! Nate Goss isn't the man to be caught asleep. He can shoot it out with the best of them. With the three of them if he has any sort of a show."

"There's only one of them to be feared—the one with scar the down his face. He's deadly," she murmured. "He hates Mr. Goss. They must have met and had trouble. He tracked your friend to Cañon City, learned about the mule and the supplies. They didn't meet him going back to town; they found the mule here. They know he went down the river. God give him a chance!"

"Why, see, Annie!" Ellis eagerly broke in. "You have the right of it, and you've proved Scar-face isn't so deadly as you think. Sure they have met and had trouble; but Nate got clear. And he ain't one to run from a fight. If he bested them once he can again. You ought to have seen him shoot it out with Charley Dodge in California Gulch!"

"Shooting! Always violence. What a country!" she whispered.

THE day passed slowly for the two. They retired early, but not to sleep. Each was listening for the sound of galloping hoofs coming up the river road and the murderous crash of gun-fire. At last Ellis slipped from his bed and crouched by the window, revolver in hand. DeLouge knew Annie had lied. He might not be so courteous when he came up the road.

A hand rested on his shoulder, and with a start he jerked his head about and beheld the slim, white-clad figure.

"Go back to bed, Frank," she urged. "They haven't had time to make Pueblo and return."

"If they find him there and get the worst of it those who come out alive may call again."

"What I said can't help, nor hurt them," she reminded. "When they saw the mule they knew the truth. I don't think DeLouge will think any the worse of us for trying to help a friend. I'm not worrying about that. He isn't that kind of a deadly man. I'm only concerned about Mr. Goss."

In the morning they kept watch of the river road while pretending not to do so. And yet a horseman approached the house and dismounted while they were eating breakfast, and they did not suspect his presence until the door flew open. Greatly startled by the unexpected and rather violent entrance of the newcomer they stared, dumbfounded for a moment, then gradually recovered some of their composure on discovering he was not one of yesterday's trio.

The scrub-growth of beard could not conceal the viciousness of the man's countenance. His clothes were of the Mexican mode and were liberally decorated with buttons of silver. He stared at them for a bit, then grunted:

"Counted on catching that rat of an Ancient when I see the smoke from your chimbly. What you squatting in his house for? Huh? Speak up sharp. I'm in a hurry."

Ellis and his sister rose from the table, and the former asked—

"Who are you?"

The stranger scowled and significantly replied—

"I'm Vince Moore. Prob'ly you've heard tell of me."

Neither had, although Moore was notorious up and down the upper valley. Ellis simply saw an intruder in him, and said—

"I don't admire your manners in knocking a door open like that."

Moore's eyes widened, showing much of the whites, then half closed as he shifted his gaze to the pink cheeks of the girl. Without glancing at Ellis he directed:

"You go outside. I'll talk to you after I've talked to your woman. Mebbe your ears are stuffed up and you didn't hear me say that I'm Vince Moore."

Ellis' face went pale and he was swept with the anger that had prompted him to promise death to Skillings. Moore, with a side glance, believed it was fear he was seeing in the young man's strained features, and he remarked:

"Mind seems to be waking up. Guess you've heard of Vince Moore after all."

Annie hurriedly said:

"The man you came to see isn't here; hasn't been here. Will you please go?"

"I will not please go," he answered, trying to mimic her gentle voice.

Ellis made an inarticulate sound and came around the table. Moore dropped a hand to his hip and half drew a gun and reminded—

"I'm Vince Moore. Git!"

"Go, Frank!" hoarsely begged the girl.

Ellis stumbled toward the door. Moore threw back his head and laughed, and with his wide-opened eyes stared at the frightened girl. He saw her hand steal to take up a table-knife, and his amusement was doubled. Then Ellis was upon him, leaping half across the room and throwing his arms about the belted waist. With a furious oath Moore struck his fist against the bowed head and attempted to reach his gun. Other blows showered on Ellis' head and face, but he did not feel them. He straightened up, lifting his man clear of the floor. Kicking and clawing and striking, Moore found himself being carried to the door. Then he centered all his efforts on attempting to get at Ellis' eyes.

With a scream of rage Ellis swung him violently about and smashed his head against the logs. They reeled over the threshold and fell to the ground. Moore was partly stunned and groped awkwardly for his gun. With another scream Ellis leaped upon him feet first and kicked and beat him insensible without hearing his sister's frantic cries for him to secure the revolver. And it was she who darted in and emptied the gaily embroidered holster.

Ellis, still mouthing terrible threats, picked up the inert figure as if it had been a bag of meal and carried it to the road and threw it down, a bloody, dirt-covered bundle of spoiled finery and bruised flesh. Then he stood erect and gasped—

"There! —— you! How does that suit?"

But Moore remained motionless. Annie ran up with the captured revolver in both hands. Sobbing loudly she kept repeating:

"So brave of you, Frank! Oh, that was so good!"

Ellis, the mock of ill fortune, had discovered himself. His shoulders went back and there was exultation in his soul as he realized that never again would he be dependent on another for protection against violence. There was blood on his face and blood on his hands where Moore's fingers had dug into the flesh.

One eye was commencing to swell and he could feel a lump on his jaw, and his lips were puffed. But he gloried in his hurts.

After panting for breath a bit he patted his sister's shoulder and told her—

"Annie, we've done taking back-talk from any rotten scum out here."

He reached out a foot and ungently stirred the prostrate man. Moore groaned and worked himself to a sitting posture and stared stupidly at his conquerer.

"You well nigh killed me," he whispered.

"Get up, you dog," commanded Ellis. He seized him by the shoulder and ripped the gay Mexican jacket beyond repair as he jerked him to his feet.

"There's your nag. Mount and ride for it. I'm keeping your gun as you don't seem to know how to use it. If any one thinks you look queer tell them you tackled the wrong man."

And forthwith he booted the man to his horse, each kick eliciting a howl.

Once in the saddle Moore used his spurs and galloped down the road and never once looked back.

With a gesture of disgust Annie passed over the revolver, but there was no homesickness nor sorrow in her face as she tearfully praised:

"Oh, I'm so proud of you, Frank! I'm beginning to think that sometimes the only way to meet violence is to use violence."

"I can lick the whole —— rotten scum!" he boasted between his swollen lips.

"Hush, dear. You're wonderful, but you mustn't swear. Now come in and let me wash your poor face."

"And I'll hand over the same kind of medicine to that scar-faced feller if he comes nosing round here again," he added, as he stalked proudly by her side to the house.

This speech brought fear back to her.

"No, no," she softly restrained. "The man who calls himself DeLouge is deadly; more so than a dozen of the beasts you whipped. But he won't bring you any trouble. He isn't bad in the way that beast is. A woman or a child would never need feel afraid of him."

"He's bad enough to kill Nate Goss if he can," mumbled Ellis.

"Yes, he'll do that. And I pray they won't meet. But he won't kill from behind. He won't ever look at a woman the way that beast did."

"I wish I'd twisted his head off!" regretted Ellis.

She bathed his face and mothered him with caresses. He accepted it all as being the due of a warrior. Then he confessed:

"Annie, before that row I was afraid of lots of things. I was afraid of Charley Dodge, the man Goss drove from the gulch. Now I've learned something. I don't have to stand for any abuse unless I want to. Mr. Frazer never stood for any abuse, I'll bet on that. And, Annie, this country looks lots better to me than it did just before breakfast. ——! I handled that feller like he was a rag doll." He laughed boisterously. "Take their guns and knives from them and I can lick a dozen of them. At least, I got that much out of swinging a pick and lifting boulders."

She glanced at Moore's gun and shuddered. That was the trouble with rats. They had no liking for a man's fight.

CHAPTER IX

PUEBLO WAKES UP

PUEBLO, at the mouth of Fontaine qui Bouille where the old Santa Fé trail to the Laramie plains crossed the Arkansas, was laid out by Buell and Boyd of Denver in the winter of 1859 and 1860. The surveyors plotted the streets wide and straight, and not being skimped for territory, made the town a likely one on paper. There was ample room on the plot sheet even for a large municipal park near the mouth of Dry Creek; and the map represented it to be filled with tropical flowers and rare shrubs, with many fountains graciously sprinkling the earth and tending to cause the greenhorn to forget the alkali dust on his ankles.

But despite its over-night growth on paper Pueblo was a substantial little settlement and had a historical background years before gold was discovered in Colorado. There were the ruins of an adobe fort and its fence of cottonwood pickets, a reminder of the 1854 massacre, when on Christmas Day the Utes killed seventeen of the garrison. Some of these victims were pursued far out on the plains where their bones were found by immigrants during the first gold rush to the Pike's Peak region.

Prior to this the first American families in Colorado wintered at Pueblo from September, 1846, to the summer of 1847. These men and women with their children were a part of the Mormon Battalion. Expelled from Illinois with bayonets, they had accepted service with the government so they might have their families safeguarded to Utah.

Those wintering at Pueblo were sent from the crossing of the Arkansas and from Santa Fé. They built houses. Children were born and died, and the survivors rejoined the Mormon migration to the Great Salt Lake in 1847. There was a world of misery and tragedy in that winter, and yet it was only an incident in the town's history.

James Beckwourth, mulatto chief of the Crows, claimed to have made the first settlement at the mouth of the Fontaine in 1842. In that year several mountain men, mostly Americans, were living there, married to Mexican women, and carrying on a trade with the Indians. Fremont saw this little, isolated community in 1843.

Major Long was there in 1820. Lieutenant Pike camped there in November, 1806, and designated the spot as the Forks. It was near the site of Pueblo that the Bent brothers built a stockade before building Bent's Fort farther down the Arkansas, to be in closer touch with the United States and Taos trade on the mountain branch of the Sante Fé Trail. Many Cheyennes moved down to the river after William Bent married one of their women.

Nathan Goss was paying his first visit to the town, and he was disappointed. There were no buildings close to the river and, with the exception of Pat Maywood's blacksmith shop on the bank, the houses were back from the bottom. The gambler engaged lodgings at Uncle Tommy Suttles' hotel, a one-story building of logs and situated on Santa Fé Avenue. Having put up his horse and left his scanty luggage he walked about the town to estimate its possibilities in games of chance.

A sign announcing that —— Roaring Bill From Bitter Creek held forth in one cabin aroused his interest. But on entering he discovered it was a small eating room and that the proprietor was a man of mild manners and much inclined to sleep. In his waking moments he must have been something of a wag, as over the short counter was a crudely printed sign that read—

Cold Cuts & pickld Eels feet. 4 bits.

Jack Allen's drinking and gaming saloon was more promising. Several Mexicans were lounging at the bar, descendants of the original holders of all the country south of the Arkansas. They were consuming Taos lightning and listening to a shocked-headed and drunken American boast that he would kill an Indian before he was a day older.

Allen scrutinized Goss sharply as the latter took his place by the boaster and ordered a glass of beer.

"Gambler?" laconically queried the proprietor.

"I play cards sometimes if that's what you mean," Goss replied.

"Well outfitted?"

"Both guns and cash."

"You don't need any guns. This is a decent town."

"Now you just wait a minute, Jack," gravely broke in the drunken man.

"Shut up, Bowker!" snapped Allen. "You're drunk."

Then to Goss he explained:

"Games start about eight o'clock. They keep running as long as the money lasts."

"Town seems to be empty," remarked Goss.

"Don't you believe it, mister," warmly cried Allen. "See it at night and you'll swear it's Denver on its hind legs and hooting."

"Sounds hopeful. If there's a poker game worth while I might be interested."

"I know just the kind of an outfit you're hunting for. Black Bill, a Mexican."

"I prefer Americans. Understand them better," informed Goss hastily.

"Oh, you'll understand Bill. A child can understand him. Fair to middling player and always well heeled with cash."

"Miner? Trader? Freighter?" rapidly asked Goss.

"Why, sort of a general business," Allen began.

But the drunken man laughed loudly and jeered:

"General business? The kind that takes lots of hoss-flesh to carry it on, eh, Jack? And a stage coach or two, and a cache of gold dust."

"Will you shut up, you poor —— fool?" hissed Allen. "You're talking yourself to death."

The man cast a frightened glance at the swarthy profiles along the bar and held his tongue. Allen amiably resumed for the gambler's benefit:

"We have some of the nicest bank games you can find anywhere, mister. They're simon-pure on the square."

"They always are," heartily agreed Goss. "Maybe I'll look in later." He was making for the door when the drunken man bawled after him:

"I can show you the best game of all, stranger. Just you trail after me and see me pot an Injun."

"Bowker, you git to bed or you'll never git another drink in this place," roared Allen.

For the first time in his wanderings Goss felt lonesome. The sensation was irritating because it was new. He felt out of sorts and out of place as he wandered down the street, and he wished himself nearer the mountains. He dropped into John Thatcher's small log cabin store on Second Street between Santa Fé and Main to replace a gun he had given to young Ellis. He selected a thirty-one caliber Colt, its six-inch barrel making for precision, well balanced as well as accurate.

"Doesn't seem to be much going on here," he remarked to the merchant.

Thatcher, on the road to honors and riches from small beginnings, quickly inventoried his customer, and replied:

"All depends on what one is looking for. We're a trade center for a considerable stretch of the valley. Trade comes down the Fontaine and up from the St. Charles. But folks don't make a lot of noise in growing crops and selling supplies. There's more bustle and excitement over one stage robbery than you'll find in planting a big orchard, such as Frazer plans to put in up near Cañon City. From one point of view there's lots going on in Missouri; but it's guerrilla warfare and doesn't lead to anything permanent."

"I'm not hankering for gun play, or I'd bought a Colt's navy model. But this town seems empty. Many come down this far from the mines to spend the winter?"

"Some. Cañon City and Denver get the bulk of them."

Thatcher was called away to wait on another customer, a swarthy-faced man with the cheek bones of an Indian. He wore much Mexican finery but had a red cloth tied around his black hair in place of a hat. He walked by Thatcher without heeding his greeting and came to where Goss was standing and pointed to a Remington forty-four handgun, solid frame, and tersely asked—

"How much?"

Being told the price he paid from a handful of gold and departed. Thatcher looked after him and remarked, "I would have preferred not to have sold him that revolver. But he knows guns, and he smells excitement, as it makes two he will be carrying."

"Breed?"

"His father was John Smith, government interpreter; mother a Cheyenne. His white name is Jack Smith. White men won't accept him as one of them and he trails with the Indians. He's more bitter against the whites than if he was a full-blood."

GOSS wandered back to Uncle Tommy's log house and played solitaire in a corner and tried to work out of his depression. He had rejoiced in escaping from the mountains. Now the snow-covered peaks were kindly reminiscent. Undoubtedly he would have been more contented in Denver. That was the place for a man of mettle. There were many gaming places in Denver and many men who felt lucky. He would have saddled his horse forthwith and started up the valley if the road had not led by the ranch once owned by Ancient Days. He smiled grimly at a new thought and told himself:

"Thatcher would have a better opinion of me if I'd told him I owned land down this way. But Cañon City is feverish alongside of this place."

That night he remained in his lodgings and experienced the novelty of retiring early. That he must have slept soundly was proven when Uncle Tommy in the morning garrulously greeted:

"Did you hear popping last night? ——! But such doings! Parcel of the boys rode down the river to bust up a meeting of the Knights of the Golden Circle. Lost their courage, or something, or else there wasn't any meeting. Got filled with Taos and come back here looking for trouble. Got to letting off guns in Allen's place. I thought at first that men from Texas had come to capture the territory."

"Dear me!" sighed Goss as he sat down to his breakfast. "Some one nearly struck some one else in anger."

"Oh, it didn't git to real trouble. Sheriff Hank Way come along and told them to quit or they'd have a fuss with him. They quit."

This bit of gossip helped Goss to form a entirely false estimate of the town. It not only lacked life but it lacked guts. The would-be reckless were satisfied with making believe to be bad men. He held it in contempt.

As a fact, many desperate characters drifted into Pueblo from Sante Fé and Taos, from Missouri and Texas—silent, deadly men who made no more noise than a man planting corn. Some passed up the valley to Cañon City, some to Colorado City at the base of Pike's Peak, some to Denver. In the summer season they unobtrusively penetrated to the gold camps. And all ultimately returned, if not killed in their venturing, back to Pueblo and south, or across the Plains to the River.

There was no harm in the blustering group that rode down the valley in search of southern sympathizers, but those quiet, tight-lipped men, who linked up Denver and the boom camps to New Mexico with a chain of crime, had great capacity for evil.

The Mexican man who drew aside to give Goss the door when the gambler took to the street would kill as readily as he would swallow a glass of Taos lightning did murder promise him the slightest gain or convenience. The undersized American, born in Illinois, slight of figure and inoffensive of face, who bowed courteously on recognizing the gambler's calling, carried two guns under his black frockcoat and had earned the notches on each.

Near noon that day there was a ripple of excitement when word was passed that Ruel Bowker had made good his boast of the evening before by murdering an Arapaho Indian two miles down the river. Goss arrived in front of Aaron Simms' house shortly after Bowker came in to receive the praise of his saloon friends. He was proudly exhibiting a bow and a quiver of arrows taken from the dead man. A crowd quickly collected. Bowker, feeling the elation of a hero, waved an Allen & Thurber pepperbox, thirty-one caliber, and loudly proclaimed:

"Here's the medicine I done it with. I can kill a whole tribe."

Jack Smith, the mixed-blood, rode up from the east and leaped from his horse and would have shot Bowker out of the saddle had not a citizen seized his arm. Several other men joined in restraining Smith. Murderous looks and loud threats were cast at him.

Bowker renewed his blustering when he beheld Smith helpless. Allen A. Bradford, soon to be appointed to the supreme court bench of the territory, released his grip on Smith's arm, and demanded: "What do you know about this? Did you see it happen?"

Restrained from taking summary vengeance Smith sullenly explained:

"I found the Arapaho man dying. A speck far up the road was his killer. The Arapaho man told me the white man was drunk and began shooting without saying a word."

A trader shook his fist at Bowker and denounced:

"It's fools like you that fetch us trouble. The Arapahos are friendly. You killed without any reason."

"The Taos in him did the killing," added another.

"Bowker did right. All Injuns oughter be shot to ——!" yelled one of the assassin's drinking companions. "Hooray for old Ruel!"

"That kind of talk doesn't do this town any good," sternly rebuked Bradford. "By this man's own tell he's committed murder from pure wantonness. We can't pass it over."

"Hold court right here!" cried the trader. "You hear the evidence, Bradford."

This suggestion was warmly endorsed by the law-and-order element. Bradford urged:

"Let's go to the back room of Boone's store and find out just what happened. Let's not be hasty in our procedure. We'll hold an inquest as to just how the Indian came to his death."

"You folks act peeved," began Bowker, taken back by the suggestion his act was not worthy of unrestrained praise.

"Bowker, you keep shet," broke in one of his friends. "If a fuss is going to be made about this matter we'll let t'other side furnish the proof. And we ain't taking any half-breed's word as to what any dying Injun told him."

The gathering promptly adjourned to Colonel Boone's store on lower Santa Fé Street and borrowed the use of the back room from Dr. Catterson, the manager. Hank Way was sent for to take charge of the prisoner and to see that Smith remained peaceful. The sympathy of many was with the accused, and Bowker, believing himself safe, refused to heed all admonitions and with drunken gravity boasted he had fired the fatal shot at a distance of seventy-five to a hundred yards. This statement aroused considerable laughter. As there was no other witness to the homicide, Smith was called on to testify, and eager to convict Bowker, repeated the victim's ante-mortem statement and swore the Arapaho told him the white man began shooting the moment he came in sight.

"That pepper box won't carry that far. Turn Ruel loose!" some one insisted.

"We ain't got any jail. That pepper box won't kill at thirty yards except by accident," cried another. "Ruel was drunk and just shooting promiscus. If he hit the Injun it was a miracle."

A third man insisted all present serve as a jury and called for a vote by a show of hands. Even those who deplored the crime knew Bowker could not have shot with precision even at twenty-five yards. The gathering grew tumultuous and the trader, who wanted Bowker punished, in great disgust agreed:

"All right. Let it be a show of hands. It was a brutal murder, but the drunken fool hit by pure luck."

"Hands! Hands! All who say Ruel Bowker is innocent hold up their hands!"

This was repeated in a chorus and Bradford said:

"I resign. You've taken the matter into your own hands. Unfortunately the evidence is one-sided as to the distance. I believe the man should be held for a formal trial."

But this suggestion was cried down. Hands were again called for and Bowker was overwhelmingly acquitted. On leaving the room Goss fell in beside the trader who had wanted justice done, and remarked—

"Well, the man goes free."

"Yes, Smith spoiled any chance to punish him by saying the Rapaho said Bowker began shooting the second he came in sight.

Of course we know he was close to the Indian when he shot him. Within a few feet. But we'll have a jail soon and we'll get a tight grip on this town. I'm afraid we'll hear from Smith later."

They were to hear from him two years later at Sand Creek where he was killed in the fight with Chivington's men.

Goss walked about the town to kill time and then returned to his lodgings. In front of Suttles' place he encountered Bradford and spoke of the trial and remarked:

"The whole business seems to be a mighty raw deal. Plainsmen, friends of mine, say the Cheyennes and Sioux are getting uneasy and want to go the Minnesota Sioux several better, and will bring us a big fight another season."

"I fear so. After this murder the Arapahos are bound to be more favorable for a general war. In trade?"

"No. Gambler."

"I'm sorry. Not questioning the morality of card playing, but I can't see that it leads to anything permanent. Simply a matter of getting on and making the most of opportunities. A man at forty should have an assured income from business or one of the professions."

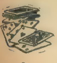
Goss felt no resentment at this frank speech, but insisted:

"I can always look out for myself. When I can't I won't be a burden to a community."

"I was thinking beyond that," said Bradford. "It's a man's bounden duty to look after more than himself. It's his civic duty to marry and support his wife and bring up several youngsters to be good citizens."

Goss inwardly winced, but carelessly replied:

"I've always drifted and find it hard to settle down."



HE CARRIED Bradford's words with him into the little hotel. He had heard much the same in Denver. Frank Ellis and his sister condemned his occupation. Now he was rebuked in a town where a cold-blooded murderer was released and treated as a hero. Yet he was too honest not to realize that Bradford was a fine type of citizen and meant him well. And what made him uneasy was the fear he might come to accept the same view of gambling as a means of earning a living. He endeavored to mock the distinction between gambling occasionally and steadily, but got nowhere. He played solitaire after the noon meal and slept for a few hours.

After supper he went to Allen's place and this time found it well filled. Men were still celebrating Bowker's acquittal. Cheers were frequently given the killer, whereat the latter, leaning against the end of the bar near the open window, felt called upon to announce his intention to exterminate all the red man in Colorado. When Goss entered Bowker was growing reminiscent in his boastful talk.

Pausing with a glass half raised he grinned cunningly at his admirers and lifted an unsteady hand for silence, then began:

"If any of you fellers go down to the Purgatory far enough you'll find seven graves in one tree. All men. Ask Ruel Bowker how they come to be stuck up there to dry. Mebbe he'll tell you, mebbe he won't."

Much praise greeted this intimation that the speaker had been a wholesale killer. Bowker continued:

"Only way to civ'lize this country. Got to wipe 'em all out. All of 'em. Few miles from that tree you'll find, if it ain't been knocked down, platform built of Star cracker boxes where some sort of a Rapaho chief's laid out. Ask Ruel how that feller come to die sort of sudden. Mebbe he'll tell, mebbe he won't."

"You keep on, Ruel, and there won't be an Injun left 'tween here'n the mountains," applauded a bullwhacker. "And there can't be too few of 'em to suit my game."

"Well, there won't be enough left to make trouble by another season," modestly admitted Bowker. "And before the end of next summer you'll begin to hear of dead Utes found scattered round up in the hills."

The door opened and Jack Smith entered and stood with his back to the wall. Bowker ceased talking. His gaze grew wild and he fumbled for the pepper box in his belt. Allen leaned over the bar and yanked his hand away and warned:

"None of that, Bowker. No killings in here."

"That breed means mischief!" cried Bowker.

Smith folded his arms and told the crowd: "That man has the heart of a rabbit."

"Rabbit or lion, you'll be a dead man if you start any fuss," warned the bullwhacker. "What you mean coming here amongst white folks for?"

"I have money," slowly replied Smith. "My father was a white man. The white part of me can drink."

And he walked to the lower end of the bar and tossed a gold piece on the board.

Business was business to Jack Allen, and if the interpreter's son could pay his way his money was as precious and desirable as another's. He pushed forward a bottle and glass. Smith's red blood showed when he refused the glass and drank from the bottle. Several feet separated him from the other patrons at the bar, and none showed any inclination to join him. Bowker craned his neck and gazed uneasily down the line to make sure the man was in his place and not about to attack. Smith gave no heed to his half brothers and continued drinking slowly from the bottle. Bowker decided the fellow was intimidated, and he renewed his boasting.

"It made me laff," he began, "when the trader wanted me tried right in the street. As if there was a town or camp in Colorado that would be ag'in me for killing——"

A shrill whistle sounded outside in the darkness. Some did not appear to notice it. Among these was Smith, the halfbreed, who had both arms resting on the bar, his hands clutching the bottle. Bowker was among those who heard, being nearest the window. The whistle sounded a second time. Bowker straightened and staggered from the bar toward the window, and extended a hand as if to close it. Then he gave a sharp cry and reeled back against the bar and slid down to a sitting posture.

"Good ——! Look!" screamed the bullwhacker, pointing.

Smith, with bottle half raised, was the only one not to surge around the inert figure. From under Bowker's left arm protruded a long, feathered shaft.

"Indian work!" exclaimed Goss. "Shot through the window."

Jack Smith came forward and after one glance informed—

"Arapaho arrow."

Allen leaped over the bar and led the rush to the door. Goss remained and saw the breed's dark visage crack with a smile as he more leisurely made for the exit, carrying what was left of his bottle of liquor. Outside the door came exclamations and oaths. Then a rough voice rose above the others in angrily demanding—

"What you mean, running —— bent into a peaceful man?"

And a powerfully built fellow entered, followed by Jack Allen who was endeavoring to explain the precipitate flight from the room.

"Quit that yapping and give me a drink," impatiently interrupted the newcomer." Hunting Injuns in Pueblo is fool's talk. If you want to find Injuns—" He halted and stared at the dead man. "Who done that?" he hoarsely asked.

"I've been trying to tell you, mister," Allen replied. "Some Injun sneaked up to the open winder and shot him with that arrer."

"I see," muttered the stranger. "Sure he's dead?"

"Deader'n last year's flowers."

The patrons of the place began returning. They had no relish for trailing a killer in the night. As they straggled into the bar room the stranger announced:

"I'm Mose Peters, just down from Tarryall. Maybe I bumped into some of you boys when you was hustling through the door. Or you bumped into me. Thought the place must be on fire. Close the winder and licker."

Before returning to his post behind the bar Allen had Bowker's body removed to a shed room and sent a man to bring the sheriff. Then he faced his line of customers. Goss came from his corner and did what was unusual for him when he stood beside Peters and followed the others' example by taking whisky.

Peters puzzled and fascinated him. The man's clothing was new. Long black coat, trousers and hat, all were recently purchased. The boots were new and shiny, and Peters seemed glad to rest his weight on one foot to ease the other. Like the gambler, and unlike the rest of the company, he was clean shaven. His face was a walnut brown as if tanned by the elements.

He was not a gambler but an outdoors man, much in the sun and winds. The voice had first attracted Goss' interest, being hoarse and reminiscent of one the gambler had heard. Had Peters not announced Tarryall as his starting place the gambler would have put him down as a fresh arrival from the River, with his face, hands and wrists baked by the plains sun. The hair, cut short, also suggested the immigrant.

But few greenhorns ever carried themselves with as much assurance as he was revealing. With sidelong glances the gambler observed how he shifted his position, easing first one foot, then the other, which was reminiscent of Whip King in new foot gear; and how he twitched his broad shoulders as if finding the coat to be annoying.

A chorus of voices wished Peters good luck and health. Allen, at leisure for a minute took over the situation and told of the Arapaho's death and described the killing of Bowker. The man at the end of the bar, where Bowker had stood, hastily finished his drink and shifted his position down the line. Another, more bold, attempted in pantomime to show just how Bowker walked to the window, cried out and fell.

The bullwhacker thumped his fist on the bar for attention and loudly demanded—

"Where's that halfbreed? Bet he done it! —— him!"

Goss spoke up, saying:

"Smith was drinking at the bar when the man was shot. He didn't leave this room until after Bowker fell to the floor."

"Who'n —— be you, mister?" truculently asked the bullwhacker.

"I'm the man who saw Smith quit this room after Bowker was killed," Goss quietly replied. "He couldn't be outside the window, shooting in, and on the inside, about to go out at the same time."

"You're too —— smart," sneered the bullwhacker, swinging from the bar and edging nearer Goss. "You ain't answered my question. Who be you?"

"Oh, that? I'm something of a trouble doctor. Sometimes folks like you, looking for trouble, come to me to be cured. Never had the same patient call on me twice."

This piece of braggadocio centered all eyes upon him as he moved a few steps from the bar to meet the bullwhacker. The bullwhacker took careful note of his dandified appearance and advanced no farther, even when some one laughed derisively. Allen shrewdly read danger in the dark, expressionless face and shook his head to the bullwhacker. The latter met the steady gaze for a few moments, then decided he preferred drink to trouble and stepped back to the bar, mildly agreeing:

"Of course the breed couldn't be in two places at once."

Having disconcerted the bullwhacker Goss swiftly shifted his gaze and stared squarely into the amazed face of the newcomer. His own eyes flickered in surprize for a second; then he was shouldering his way to a position beside the man, and as he lifted his glass as though drinking the stranger's health he murmured—

"Lomsom."

"Outside," grunted the White Chief of the Utes. Then he lifted his raucous voice in an invitation for all to drink hearty.

Hank Way bustled in and the drinking was suspended while he investigated the death of Bowker. Allen briefly described the tragedy and added, "Jack Smith says the arrow was an Arapaho arrow. Being half Injun he ought to know."

"It isn't surprizing," commented the sheriff. "A white man can't always kill a friendly Indian and not make some of the tribe mad. Where's the body?"

He was conducted to the adjoining shed, the men crowding in behind him. Goss and Lomsom remained at the bar. The former emptied his glass on the floor and hurriedly asked—

"You've quit your red friends, Lomsom?"

"Come outside. More room," muttered Lomsom.

Once through the door and out of the light streaming through the windows Lomsom halted long enough to pull off his boots, and with a sigh of relief walked in his barefeet to the river bank. They sat down near Maywood's blacksmith shop. Lomsom was the first to speak, saying:

"Beats —— we should meet like this."

AS HE spoke he tossed something over the bank and into the river. Goss ducked instinctively at the gesture. Lomsom reassured:

"Just heaving something away. Something I don't dast carry. But one of my Utes would risk his life before he'd heave it away. Tail feather of a chaparral cock hitched to a whistle. Good to carry in your mouth in a medicine dance."

"A whistle! It was a whistle—" began Goss.

"I blew it. Met Jack Smith first thing on coming to town after dark. He knows me. Told me about the Rapaho's death. Had to square myself with him, or kill him to stop his giving me away. He give me the Rapaho's bow and arrers. I blew the whistle, hoping to git the skunk to step from the bar so I could git a shot at him.

Skunk oughter been killed even if my Utes don't love the Rapahos.

"Smith's part white. He'n me have done some dickering and hoss swapping on the side. But the Rapahos would give a heap for my hair. So I had to trade with him. If I didn't, and slipped up on killing him on the spot, the Rapahos would see that I never got back to the mountains alive. Them, not white folks, I was skeery about."

"You killed Bowker!" muttered Goss.

"I've said so. And you'll keep shut. From what Smith said there's white men in this town that wanted to hang the cuss. Don't go to making trouble for me and I won't send any war pipe to you."

"It's so —— cold-blooded. Bowker needed killing, all right. But to kill him offhand at some one else's say."

"See here, Goss, are you ag'in me? I want to know right now."

And Lomsom shifted his position.

"I have a very murderous derringer covering you," warned Goss. "However, I'm no talker. Bowker was no good. It's true some of the citizens favored hanging him. It's all come out in the wash. That's all in the discard. Let go of that knife or gun and tell me why you quit the Indians."

Lomsom relaxed and began:

"Just had to take a little trip alone. ——! But I've been so hungry for white men's lights and houses, and a white man's bar and victuals, I just couldn't stand it. Used to git me hard at times, but it was worse'n ever after you three fellers skun out. Told my young men I was off to the top of a mountain to make big medicine and would be gone some time if the medicine was slow to work. Got rid of my Injun rig, cleaned off the paint, and put on some odds and ends of clothes my boys stole from the whites. Then I made Tabor's store at Buckskin and bought this outfit. But —— them boots! They'll be the death of me."

Goss, still nonplussed by the man's unconcern over Bowker's death, endeavored to hide his aversion and next inquired—

"Going back to the Utes soon?"

"Have to winter with 'em. But if I find what I'm looking for on this trip I'll quit 'em for good next season."

"Looking for something?" prompted Goss.

"For that young skunk with the funny name, Euclid. Cuss him! He knows more about gold than Gregory does. He busted all my plans when he skinned out on me."

"The Utes would have killed him if he hadn't escaped," reminded Goss.

"Mebbe. Some one had to be killed after smoking that medicine-pipe. But if you had stuck my man's hide would have been safe. T'other young feller was the one they was keen to burn. They'll burn him yet if they ever git hold of him. Where'd he go to?"

"Denver. On his way to the River by this time. You came down the valley?"

"By traveling at night and keeping to the south side of the river. Some of my Utes are down near Cañon City, looking for hosses. Didn't want to run foul of them," explained Lomsom. "Yesterday I made a big smoke that'll scare them back to the mountains. They'll think it's made by Cheyennes and Rapahos. Know where that Euclid is?"

"Haven't an idea. Probably in Denver, Central City. Up that way somewheres."

Lomsom swore under his breath, then complained:

"It beat all bad luck that I had to lose him. I know half a dozen likely gold placers. Any one of them would make my everlasting fortune if I knew what he knows about gold. With a big pile of dust I'd light out for the River and keep on going till I struck some big city in the East. Then I'd settle down and live like a gen'leman."

"Of course that's the trick to turn," the gambler encouraged. "But just what are you down here for?"

"To search the valley for the young feller. Had to begin at this end as my Utes were hanging round Cañon City. Now the smoke's scared them back I'll look for him up stream on my way back. Then again, Goss, I'm lonely. God knows how lonely. I was born and raised white. I am white. I knifed a man in Pete Dotson's wagon train out of Salt Lake City. He had it coming to him, but I had to run for it. I fell in with a small band of Utes, painted up and become their leader. Younger men who wouldn't mind the older leaders. I've been with them ever since. They look on me as one of them. I've tried to be one of them. Almost fooled myself at times. But I can't ever forgit I'm white. And I'm hungry for white men's company. I'm sick of paint and lodges and eating Injun grub out of a kettle. I've seen the time when I'd almost trade one of my secret placers for some white cooking, 'specially cake."

Goss waited for him to talk himself out, and then inquired—

"About the Rabbit? What happened to him after we escaped?"

"Nothing. He had the Stone God to trade. Made the bargain on the pipe. He's slick. Utes want to keep him. Nothing could happen to him even if he hadn't given the Stone God back. As the Walking Dead Man, he's mighty big medicine. They'd as quick think of trying to hurt a ghost as him. He left a couple of days after you did. But what a fool to go back to the nation to be stuck up against a cartwheel or tree and shot!"

"Odd. But he's a real man. Nothing can stop him from doing what he believes is his duty. Don't go back to the Utes, Lomsom. Plenty of room for you. Nevada, or the rich diggings up north. Or on a ranch down here."

"My medicine tells me to find pay dirt enough to send me back East before I can be shut of the Utes. Well, let's be gitting back. You keep shut and I'll keep shut."

And with a groan he pulled on his boots.

"Just a minute. Only an idea of mine. I know two men who know as much if not more about placers than Euclid does. I'm sort of thinking to do a little prospecting. Early next season we might make a trade. You lead a party of us to one of your hidden placers. If there's gold in it there'll be enough for five of us."

Lomsom remained silent for a couple of minutes, then slowly said:

"That's a talk I'll have to smoke on. I don't mind others making a killing if I can make mine. But I ain't going to risk uncovering a rich lode and be robbed of my share."

"It was only an idea," carelessly replied Goss. "You'd be foolish to go into it if you couldn't trust me. By spring I'll probably be out of the notion. We'll go back."

"I'll think it over and smoke on it," mumbled Lomsom, crawling to his feet. "Just remember I'm Mose Peters down here. First time you ever see me. You keep shut and I'll keep shut."

"I'm no talker," repeated the gambler. "But there's nothing you can say that'll hurt me. Going under my own name. Talk your head off if you want to."

They walked slowly back from the river and toward the lights of the saloon, Lomsom limping and cursing his new boots. Lomsom was in the lead as they reached the saloon. Goss felt a hand on his arm and wheeled quickly and recognized Jack Smith, the half-breed.

"You be careful inside," muttered the breed. "Black Bill is in there. He's been told you have money. You'll be asked to play cards."

"Why'd you bother to tell me this?" murmured Goss.

"You told them I was in the room when one man tried to pin Bowker's death on me."

He vanished abruptly around the corner of the building. Lomsom held the door part way open and querulously asked:

"What's the matter? Lost something?"

"Found a friend."

The sheriff had concluded his inquiry and had had the unfortunate Bowker removed. Some dozen men were in the room. Allen came forward and informed Goss:

"Some of the boys are keen for a little poker. They'd love to have you sit in. And your friend."

The last to Lomsom.

Goss shook his head and said—

"I never care for a little poker."

Lomsom was in a different mood, and eagerly urged:

"Let's draw a few cards. I'm hungry to play."

Goss glanced about the room to discover Black Bill and found him sitting with two men at a side table. He told Allen:

"I never care for small stakes. I'll wait till some one comes in who feels rich."

He had spoken so that all in the room might hear, and the big man, swarthy of face and with the small eyes of an Indian, came to his feet and bowed, and in excellent English called out:

"The señor need not hesitate because of the stakes. I will cut the deck with him for what he has in his clothes."

The loungers worked forward to enjoy the situation. For a few moments Goss was marveling how so small a voice could come from so big a man. He had expected to hear a bull-like roar, and had he not seen the speaker he would have said a child had strayed into the place and was prattling. Black Bill grinned wickedly as he detected what he believed to be confusion in the young man. Goss briskly advanced to the table and replied:

"All right. That's man-sized talk. Bring a sealed deck of cards. I'll cut you for two thousand on the high card. Ace is top-high."

Lomsom at his shoulder hoarsely urged:

"Cut him for four thousand. I'll put up that much. Medicine tells me you're lucky."

Black Bill flashed an ugly glance at the two, but his voice was a liquid treble as he shrugged his shoulders and confessed:

"That is beyond me. The señor is very rich. I withdraw."

"But you've got some money, ain't you?" growled Lomsom. Then, to Goss, "Oh, let's play." And he impatiently rattled gold pieces in the capacious pocket of his long coat. "If these fellers are shy of money I've got enough to make it interesting even for you, Goss."

"All right," surrendered Goss, slipping into a chair so his back would be to the wall. "A new deck. Table stakes, so every man has a chance for his money."

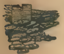
He produced two thousand dollars in gold and paper and arranged it before him.

"Would fifty dollars limit be enough for the grand señor?" politely piped Black Bill's diminutive voice.

"Excellent."

"We like nothing but jackpots down here," continued Black Bill. "The ante? Shall we say two or five dollars?"

"Five!" barked Lomsom as he stacked twenty-dollar pieces from the Denver mint.



BLACK BILL sat on Goss' left, a nondescript on his right. The fifth man was between Black Bill and Lomsom, the latter facing the wall. Black Bill produced nine hundred dollars. His two companions each tabled less. Goss did not play in the first two hands, and was quick to realize the three men were playing for a common purse. That they had some system of signaling was obvious after the two hands. After the first bet, which was raised back by the last of the trio, two would drop out, leaving the strongest hand to battle against Lomsom.

The latter lost both times, but played with much enthusiasm and evidenced his intention to participate in every pot. Goss sat in the next two hands until the whip-sawing commenced, when he dropped out. Lomsom lost four hundred dollars very quickly, but continued to smile.

It came Goss' deal and he played. The limit was bet to draw cards and he pushed in his money. It was raised back by the man on his right and he patiently saw it. The man on Black Bill's left raised again. Lomsom who had stayed, smiling with much content, for the first time gave it a boost. The man on Goss' right hesitated as if confused and dropped out. Goss saw and raised. Black Bill's broad face seemed to grow even darker. He hesitated for two seconds, then pushed in a hundred and fifty dollars. The man on his left was glad to retire. Lomsom laughed loudly and shoved his cards into the deadwood, and informed—"Just having fun trying to bluff."

"Between you and me, señor," shrilly remarked Black Bill.

Goss raised him back. Black Bill saw it and spent a minute weighing his hand. He took one card. Goss drew three. Black Bill cursed softly and dropped when the limit was bet. Goss stuck his cards in the deck and stacked his winnings.

Lomsom gloated:

"That's the time he got under your hide, mister. And at that I'm thinking you had the best hand."

"You talk too much," lisped Black Bill.

Lomsom rested one foot on the round of his chair, incidentally bringing the top of the boot leg closer to his hand, and picked up his cards. Despite his Indian training he betrayed exultation and raised for cards after Black Bill had opened. The betting before the draw was fast and furious. Goss kept out and began pocketing his money. Black Bill exhausted his pile and borrowed what remained before his friends, the two dropping after the second raise.

Lomsom grunted and chuckled as if much delighted, and taunted—

"You're in for another licking, Pretty Voice."

The spectators gathered close to the table. Among them was a well built man who walked with a vigorous step. Goss was the only person in the room who had seen him enter. He halted behind Lomsom's chair and appeared to be deeply interested in the outcome of the battle. As Lomsom boasted and threatened the newcomer tilted his head as if to hear the better. Goss watched him idly at first, then more closely as he moved to one side, as if to get a better view of Lomsom's cards, or his profile. Then the game demanded the gambler's attention as from the corner of his eye he caught a movement of Black Bill's left hand dropping for a second below the edge of the table.

Black Bill sorrowfully announced:

"I must call. I have no more money."

Lomsom was disappointed, and regretfully agreed—

"Then we can only draw and show our hands."

Each drew two cards. Goss thrust the fingers of his right hand into his left sleeve and told Lomsom, "The man's cheating. He has two cards on his knee if his friend hasn't taken them."

"You dare!" hissed the accused, darting his left hand to sash.

Goss suggestively permitted the handle of a derringer to show below his cuff and replied—

"Yes, I dare."

"Hold up!" commanded Lomsom. "Don't anybody break up this pot. I know he cheated. Mighty clumsy done. Man between us sneaked the cards from his knee and has them in his left sleeve this minute."

As he finished speaking he darted out his right hand and ripped the man's sleeve to the elbow and allowed two cards to fall on the floor.

"Beat those, Pretty Voice." And he threw down four kings. Then he raked in the pot and with his left hand proceeded to stuff his pockets. As he was picking up the last of the money he casually said—

"I cheated a little when I saw you was going below the table with cards."

Black Bill stared at him in baleful silence. Then threw down his hand and slowly rose and stepped behind his chair. Goss followed every move and did not see the man behind Lomsom's chair suddenly bow his head and glance into the renegade's face. The first he learned that anything aside from the game was happening was when he heard the explosive cry:

"Lomsom! I thought I knew you!"

Lomsom came to his feet with the quickness of a cat and swung his chair violently against the legs of the speaker and seized him by the collar and pulled him forward to sprawl over it. With one jump he was at the door.

Allen was screaming—

"He's killed Pete Dotson!"

But Dotson, the former freighter from Salt Lake City, got his footing as Lomsom passed into the night and started after him only to have his path blocked by three men.

Goss switched his gaze back to Black Bill and covered him with the derringer just as the long knife was leaving the sash. Black Bill yelped and ducked and dodged and gained the window at the upper end of the bar, opened it and vaulted through it.

Goss turned his head in time to see Dotson clear the doorway in pursuit of Lomsom. One of the strangers, who, his back to the table, was staring after Dotson, now turned about, revealing a scarred face. Goss gave one glance, and holding the derringer in his open hand, greeted:

"Glad you have shown up, DeLouge. The game has been slow, and what's worse, crooked. Man! Man! Keep your hands from that belt. This gun is small, but murderous. Send your friends to the bar while we have a bit of a talk."

CHAPTER X

THE DUEL

DELOUGE slipped into the chair vacated by Lomsom and stared thoughtfully at the gambler. The two men, absorbed in each other, were unconscious of the excitement aroused by the White Chief's flight from Pete Dotson, rancher on the south fork of St. Charles. Without moving his head, or shifting his gaze from the gambler's marble face, DeLouge said to Snap and Seth behind him:

"Clear out, boys. Get a drink. Keep away from me. I'll look you up later."

"We come along to lend a hand," reminded Snap.

"You came along so you wouldn't get hurt while riding to Texas. Clear out," repeated DeLouge without raising his voice.

Those who had trailed after Dotson were now straggling back, talking loudly, but ignorant as to the reason of Lomsom's flight. They had ventured only a short distance before realizing it was foolish to trade lights and drinks for the chance of a bullet in the darkness. These, and those who had remained in the room, sensed nothing of the drama developing at the side table.

DeLouge was the first to speak. He said—

"I'd hoped to catch up with you in quieter surroundings."

"You come, bringing trouble of course," replied Goss, his hands clasped before him, the derringer back in its sleeve holster.

"I've delayed my trip south, risked being murdered by —— Yanks just to pay you for what you did to my friend."

"A cheat and murderer before I killed him in self-defense," said Goss.

DeLouge winced, and replied:

"I'm not his judge. The South lost a good man when you killed him."

"Your point of view. I'll kill the best man the South has if he tries to murder me and I'm able to kill him."

"I'm not interested in the ethics of it," softly remarked DeLouge. "I was simply answering your question."

"That's ended. But I'm interested to know how you found me so quickly," said Goss.

"You are undone by kindness," returned DeLouge, the corner of his mouth twisting up in a crooked smile. "You bought a lot of grub and packed it down the valley on a mule. I found the mule."

Goss' face slipped from control for an instant. DeLouge observed it and smiled the more.

"A little ranch house. A young lady who lied nobly. Said you hadn't been there. Her brother is rather stupid, I think. But she seemed to know I was carrying a fight. She vowed you had not been there the moment I put the question."

"DeLouge, I'd forgive anything before I'd forgive trouble to the young people at the ranch," murmured Goss. "I'm not ducking a fight any longer. Had I known you'd been to that ranch you would have met me on the road, coming to find you."

DeLouge's eyes glowed with feral light. "Why, —— you!" he softly began. "You're taking it for granted I don't know how to treat quality folks. The young man is slow to comprehend things, but he is a gentleman. The young woman might have been my sister so far as any word of mine could ruffle her feelings."

Goss believed him. The man could be as deadly as a cobra, but no woman would ever have cause to complain of him. The gambler had met the type before, and frankly apologized:

"I was too quick to suspect the wrong thing. You're not that sort. Perhaps I won't fight as well now I know you were courteous to my friends, but I shall feel much better."

"To —— with your feelings. You've charged me with being the worst thing possible."

"And I'm going to give you satisfaction," coldly assured Goss. "I don't like the notion of having folks looking for me and following at my back. Is it to be a nip and tuck affair right here or something arranged and carried out by rule? I see you have brought two friends with you."

"The second insult since I've been in this chair. You've seen my friends before. You know they'd be snagged by some of your Yankee friends if left alone. If I can't beat you on the draw as we sit here I surely can kill you while you're killing me. But my idea is to walk off alone together, one man coming back."

Goss nodded and unclasped his hands, and approved:

"That would be much better than shooting each other up at this table. We'd both die. There's a chance for one to live the other way, and I'm beginning to feel lucky."

"Good!" softly exclaimed DeLouge. "I'm carrying one gun. Of course you're outfitted."

"A thirty-one Colt and a derringer. I'll discard the derringer."

"Keep it. It'll balance my gun, a forty-four. I want no advantage in this business. And there's no time like tonight. I should be leading my friends toward Texas before sun-up. The starlight is very bright, and I suppose there's plenty of room around here where we won't be interrupted."

"Down by the ruins of the flour mill will do nicely," promptly informed Goss.

"Then let's be moving. I'm mortal keen to be riding south."

Goss admiringly told him:

"I like your optimism. I like to see a man play his hand just as though he believed it's a winner. I'm ready."

And he pushed back his chair and cast a swift glance at DeLouge's two followers, who were busy at the bar. DeLouge quickly assured him:

"Snap and Seth will wait for me here. If you come back they'll strike out down the valley alone. Have you any arrangements to make?"

"What money is in my clothes and a paper showing I own a ranch, are to be given to Ellis and his sister, where you found the mule. If left with John Thatcher, or Allen Bradford, with those instructions, either will carry out my wishes."

"I'll see that it's done, if I have to break my trip and carry them in person," promised DeLouge.

Goss smiled grimly, and observed:

"You're very confident. But you'd better tell your friends to have their horses ready and to ride hard and fast once I return, for I might not be able to save them. Pueblo men rode down the river last night, hunting for southern men. Their rum gave out. They didn't ride far. Next time they'll try hard to make a killing."

"An accident might happen," quietly agreed DeLouge, coming to his feet. "I'll advise them accordingly."

He walked to the bar and talked to Seth and Snap, and while thus engaged a shout of laughter caused him to wheel. The gathering was mirthful over the sadly battered appearance of a man standing in the doorway.

"Darned if it ain't Vince Moore!" shouted the bullwhacker. "You look like a thousand steers had trompled on you, Vince."

"In another minute his clothes will drop off!" cried another.

Moore's face was bruised and swollen almost beyond recognition. His clothes were ripped and torn. His belt held no weapons. He slowly advanced to the bar and poured out a stiff drink. Then he slowly fastened his gaze on the laughing men, and there was something in the half-closed, discolored eyes that quickly caused the merriment to subside. Bolting his drink he hoarsely promised:

"Those who treated me like this will pay a mighty high price. And I don't feel like gentling any one that takes it as a joke."

"Shucks, Vince, we're your friends," cried the bullwhacker. "We thought you'd been tossed by your hoss. If any one's played you dirt you know who to call on."

Moore cast a glance at his torn clothes and grimly informed the bullwhacker:

"All right. I'm calling on you now. Come outside."

With that he limped to the door, slowly followed by the wondering bullwhacker.

DeLouge returned to the table, and Goss remarked—

"Other folks seem to be having their troubles."

"That Moore's a bad customer. Never saw him before, but I've heard of him. His game is stealing horses. Hope he gets what he deserves. Must have run into a bad storm. No gun, clothes nearly ripped off him, walks as if he was broken into pieces. He's been manhandled severely but no gun fighter did it. I've spoken to the boys and we can get down to business."

Goss led the way outdoors and glanced about for Moore and the bullwhacker. The two worthies were not to be seen. Without a word the duelists walked toward what was left of the first flour mill built in Pueblo. Erected and equipped for work in seven days by B. A. Rockafellow it had burned to the ground before it could turn out a bag of flour.

When a short distance from the ruins Goss halted and impatiently remarked—

"Seems some one is ahead of us. We'll go down on the river bank."

DeLouge suggested:

"We can wait a bit. They'll be moving on soon."

He sat down and Goss dropped to the ground beside him.

Several figures by the ruins moved toward the waiting men. They were talking, and one raised his voice and declared:

"But we don't need any army, Vince. Black Bill's a plenty. If you round up any more I'll be thinking you're planning to tackle a fort."

"Bill's the only one Ed will fetch. Told him to bring me a gun."

"Ed's the bullwhacker," Goss whispered to DeLouge.

"That'll make six of us," grumbled the man who objected to a crowd. "S'pose we leave Culp and Ben out of it. Four's enough."

"Not by a jugful!" objected a new voice. "Any fun going on we're in it. Ain't that your mind, Ben?"

"All the time," replied a nasal voice. "Waggle's always keen to play a lone hand if there's a pretty woman in it."

"Pretty ——!" snarled Moore. "Look here, don't you fellers size this game up wrong. Her brother left me looking like this. Got my gun in the bargain. Of course he jumped me by surprize when I 'lowed he was wilting. But he got me. Me! Vince Moore. None of you folks think I'm any chicken."

"You're no scrub, Vince," agreed Waggle. "Feller must be a natural-born killer to do what he done with his naked hands."

"Worse'n any bad man I ever ran against," growled Vince.

A LOW whistle sounded below the ruins. The talking ceased. The signal was answered, and two figures came around the east end of the ruins. Then Moore exclaimed—

"Black Bill and Ed."

The four of them turned about and hastened to join Black Bill and the bull-whacker.

Goss clasped his hand around DeLouge's wrist and tightened his grip until DeLouge reminded:

"You're forgetting there's a bone there. What's all that talk mean? Making trouble for some woman, I take it."

"Planning trouble for the young woman who lied to you," gritted Goss. "Her brother's my friend. But I never knew he could manhandle any one the way Moore's been used."

"That youngster!" incredulously whispered DeLouge. "He appeared to me to be a sheep. The girl did all the talking."

"He wasn't a sheep when Moore called on him," was the grim reply. "The man they call Waggle is a bad one. Ought to have killed him in California Gulch when I ran his boss, Charley Dodge out of the camp. Look here, DeLouge, this trouble of ours must wait. Some fifteen miles down the river is a ranch where you and your friends will be welcome. It's a rendezvous for southern men making back home to get into the big fight. I'm riding up the river road mighty soon. I'll send word to you, or come to find you, after I've finished my business and get back to Pueblo."

"I always hanker to keep close to the man I'm planning to shoot. I'll go with you," murmured DeLouge.

"That's mighty decent of you. I may be glad of your gun," whispered Goss. "But you're making it harder for me when we walk out alone next time. Now we must get our horses and keep watch to know when they start up the valley."

"I'll have to get a fresh horse," said DeLouge. "Got any friends in town who'll keep an eye on them and bring us the word when they start?"

Goss rapidly recalled the men he had met in Pueblo and finally decided:

"There's a fellow, a mixed-blood. Jack Smith, by name. He thinks he's in my debt. The sheriff won't do. He'd stop them and simply postpone their visit. And we want the —— business settled and not hanging fire. If I can't locate Smith we'll have to do our own watching. Arrange for a horse and meet me at Suttles' hotel on Santa Fé Avenue."

They hurried back to the town and separated. Goss glanced through the windows of Allen's saloon, but the half-breed was not there. He went on and entered Thatcher's store and announced—

"Found I'll need one of those Remington forty-fours."

"I sell guns," said Thatcher. "But I'd rather sell hoes and shovels. Don't get round-shoulders from carrying too many weapons, my young friend."

"I'll be careful," promised Goss, throwing down the price and gathering up the revolver and some ammunition.

Returning to the street he made straight for Suttles', and in front of the place came upon the man he was looking for, Jack Smith. The half-breed snarled like a mountain cat as he saw a man rapidly bearing down on him. Then the gambler entered the light of a window lamp, and the breed stood erect, and sullenly advised—

"Don't run at a man, even if he's part Indian."

"I've been hunting for you, Smith. I'm wanting to give you this twenty-dollar gold piece and to ask a favor."

He thrust the coin into the breed's hand and rapidly told him the service he required.

"You don't have to give me gold," slowly said Smith, "but I'll keep it. I know the men, all of them, —— them! A few miles down the valley and some of my mother's folks would be glad to wipe them out for me. I'll be glad to bring you word. But as it promises to be a big fight let me go with you."

"As a fighting man you'd be welcome," said Goss. "But if you're mixed up in it it would mean the slaughter of more Indians. You keep out of it. I have a rare man riding with me. He's to meet me here. Be off and find them. They were down by the flour mill. Probably back at Allen's by this time."

Smith darted away and Goss entered the hotel and proceeded to load his new gun. Uncle Tommy watched him anxiously, and inquired, "Thinking of going to war?"

"Had in mind to shoot some skunks," explained Goss.

With his weapons ready Goss took a position a short distance above the hotel.

Twenty minutes passed, then DeLouge came up. Goss signaled to him, and the southerner reported:

"I arranged with Aaron Simms for the loan of a horse. Learned anything?"

The gambler told about Smith and invited his enemy into the hotel. DeLouge feared the men might steal from town without the mixed-blood discovering their departure. This was sufficient to alarm Goss, and he suggested:

"Then one of us must remain here for Smith, while the other looks for Moore and his friends. I'll stay, as Smith wouldn't report to you. Better keep close to Allen's. They'll go there for a drink."

DeLouge vanished down the street. Goss shifted his position to one across the street in the deep shadows across and opposite the hotel. He waited so long that he began to fear both Smith and DeLouge had deserted him, or had lost the trail. His fears for the Ellis's safety became acute. To leave his post would be to risk missing the half-breed. He crossed the street, having decided to enlist Uncle Tommy and to send him to reconnoiter Allen's place and report back on those present. He was at the door when a furtive figure darted from the shadows across the street and in a low voice, hailed him. Goss gave a sigh of relief on beholding Smith.

The half-breed informed:

"They've been drinking all this time. Now they go for their horses."

"Did you see a man with a scar on his face?"

"He was outside. He said he was scouting for you. He ran away when the men left the bar to get their horses."

"My horse is in the little corral behind the hotel. Go and saddle him and bring him here. I'm waiting for the man with the scar."

Smith hurried away. He was soon back with the gambler's horse. There followed a brief period of waiting; then sounded the welcome *clump-clump* of hoofs. As Goss swung into the saddle DeLouge rode into the light, mounted on a rawbone roan.

"Your man's reported, I see," he greeted. "This beast is an ugly ——, but Simms says he can travel with the best. Shall we make for the valley road?"

Goss nodded and led the way. On the west side of the town they halted, having discovered no signs of the raiders. From behind them in the village the singing and shouting of men. Believing these to be their quarry they drew back from the highway and waited. The clamor died down and yet no horsemen appeared. Goss impatiently decided:

"We'll ride on. If we're ahead of them we'll be there to meet them. If behind we must arrive on their heels."

"I don't believe they've started," said DeLouge. Then he cautioned: "Some one rides from the west. Question him."

A rider was approaching at a hand gallop. The gambler took the middle of the road and called out—

"Friend, did you pass five or six men riding up the valley?"

"I see two of you, but you're the one I have covered," replied the rider.

He reined in and dismounted.

"My name is Goss. My friend and I are strangers here. We seek six men riding west."

"I'm Pete Dotson, and I've been chasing a cowardly murderer. Your six friends are tearing up the road, half drunk! Poor company to be hunting! Both of you pass on and give me the road."

"Much obliged. But they won't thank us for overtaking them," said Goss.

And, followed by DeLouge he circled around Dotson, who had his belt gun resting across the saddle to guard against treachery.

The two proceeded at a smashing gallop for the first mile; then DeLouge spurred up beside his companion and reminded:

"Not too fast. We have some thirty miles to cover."

"I'm not keen for them to reach the ranch ahead of us," answered Goss.

Yet he pulled down to a more sensible pace.

They covered ten miles at a moderate gait and Goss was again growing fearful they would be too late when the faint sound of voices struck them. He was for pressing forward smartly, but DeLouge drew abreast and advised:

"Don't be a fool. They're taking it easy and having a bit of a sing. No road fighting in the dark. We can close in any time. I want more light when I begin shooting."

Goss recognized the wisdom of this and dropped to a walk. DeLouge continued—

"The boys understand that if you come back alone you're not to be troubled."

"Thanks. I never go hunting for trouble," gruffly replied Goss. "We'll hope both of us are lucky on this trip."

"And split up our hopes on the next trip. Exactly," agreed the musical voice.

"Of course," said Goss.

And he knew that only one of them, at the best, could survive when they turned against each other. Yet he admired the southerner. He admired his courage in riding down Grape Creek and into Cañon City when there were many men in the valley who would be glad to use guns in stopping his journey south. He admired his courage in abandoning his swift and stealthy flight to Texas in order to court more trouble by stretching the hunt to Pueblo. With such an indomitable man on one's track there was but one escape—by killing him.

The men ahead jogged along smartly but with no pretense of haste. It was obvious they felt secure and believed they could afford to wait until the first morning light before commencing their evil work. The hours lagged, but at last the star paled and a vague light came from the east. Now there was the danger of the six discovering the two. When the country afforded it the pursuers swung away from the road.

The light increased until they could perceive the horsemen riding in a compact body. Soon they could make out the individuals. The riders were taking their time, but they no longer sang and shouted. Their mood would be doubly vicious now the effects of Allen's Taos lightning was wearing off. At last the horizon reddened before the approach of the sun and the six men quickened their pace to a hard gallop.

"Let's close in and begin," urged Goss.

"Just a bit more light," restrained DeLouge. "I'd be ashamed to be knocked over by a chance shot from such trash. I want light enough to see just where I'm sending my lead."

Another two miles and Goss frantically exclaimed:

"We're there! They're quitting the road!"

Off to the right they soon made out the small ranch house, and DeLouge swore gently as he beheld the thin blue smoke lazily rising from the chimney. He had hoped the men would arrive before the young people had unbarred the door. He lifted the big roan alongside of Goss' spirited mount and the two thundered along, stirrup to stirrup.

Goss was the first to make out a figure standing in the doorway of the ranch, but could not tell if it were Ellis or his sister. As a warning he pulled a gun and fired it in the air.

The horseman nearest the cabin glanced back. The ranch door closed. The raiders faced about and on discovering there were but two horsemen leaving the road to attack them they separated into two bands and, riding far apart, galloped to meet the intruders.

DeLouge cried:

"Draw off to the left! We must keep apart."

He turned his horse to meet the three men approaching on his right.

THE first rays of the new sun swept the valley and brilliantly illuminated the scene. Diverging to the left, with the forty-four in his hand, Goss saw his three foes consisted of Vince Moore, Black Bill, and a man he had never seen before to his knowledge. He spared a glance for the trio riding to assail DeLouge and beheld Bill Waggle in the lead. Next to him came Ed the bullwhacker, and an unknown. These two unidentified men he knew must be Ben and Culp.

The three coming to meet the gambler had been riding in single file. Now they separated widely, Moore taking a wide circle as if to attack on the flank or in the rear. Black Bill, coming almost head on, fired the first shot. He recognized the gambler and shouted terrible threats. Goss bore steadily on, reserving his fire. Black Bill fired a second shot and swung off to his right, taking the same course pursued by Moore. Moore was so far off-side that Goss needed to turn his head to watch him. A bullet sang dangerously close to his head, fired by the originator of the raid.

Goss suddenly decided he was being outmaneuvered. To guard against Moore he must remove his gaze from Black Bill and the third man. To reduce the odds he violently checked his mount and threw himself to the ground and crouched low. Dirt flew up in his face. Bullets flew over his head from three directions, and had the men been afoot he doubtless would have been mortally wounded or killed outright before he could fire his first shot.

He centered his attention on Moore long enough to shoot once. Moore had wheeled about and was racing toward him from the left. The horse gave a scream of pain and reared. Goss could not afford another instant of attention in that direction as swift hoofs were thundering down on him on his right.

At first he thought the horse was riderless and then discovered Black Bill was hanging from the saddle like an Indian. He brought down the Remington forty-four and fired.

The horse came to a plunging halt and reared and stood so erect it seemed he must topple over backward, then pivoted and swung his rider into view. Instantly the big gun boomed the second time, and Black Bill's hands relaxed, loosing the grip on the saddle and dropping the gun. Goss saw the man slide headlong to the ground, a foot twisted in the stirrup, and shifted his attention to Moore as that worthy was emptying his revolver and dusting the ground with his lead. Moore was still mounted, but was not rushing to close quarters.

Goss fired at the dancing horse and saw it give a convulsive jump. Then he jerked his head about as shots sounded in the direction of the cabin. The third rider, bending low in the saddle and riding for life, was pounding for the road to the west. The gambler had a glimpse of a figure in the doorway of the ranch firing a revolver, and wheeled to give further attention to Moore. Behind him boomed the detonations of several shots but he could spare no time to learn how DeLouge was faring.

He began shooting at Moore who was wildly snapping an empty gun. Moore lurched sideways and almost lost his seat. Then he dropped his weapon and slumped forward and his frantic mount carried him to the road and in the direction of Pueblo at a mad gallop.

Now the gambler was free to assist DeLouge. He shifted his position, his big gun empty, and drew the Colt. He was in time to witness the end of the fight. Young Ellis was running from the house, shooting after Moore. The girl stood in the doorway. Waggle was down. The bullwhacker was down. The third man, barely able to keep in the saddle, was making back to the road.

DeLouge had fought from the saddle. He slipped to the ground as Goss ran forward. Ellis ceased firing and ran toward the victors. His sister left the doorway and slowly walked as far as the end of the house. Although the danger was past the gambler shouted to her—

"Go back!"

She had halted before he spoke. Now she came on, her face white, her lips tightly pressed together. When she came up to the three silent men she whispered—

"What have you saved us from?"

"Robbery, ma'am," replied Goss. "These men are rascals."

"Were rascals, you mean, Nate!" excitedly corrected Ellis.

DeLouge, with the glitter of battle still lighting his dark eyes, swept off his hat and bowed low, and politely added:

"By good luck, madame, I found in Pueblo the young man who had not been here. While we were chatting about various things we chanced to overhear these bandits planning this visit. We rode after them. You behold."

"You've killed them!" faintly cried the girl, staring fearfully at the three prostrate figures.

DeLouge glanced over the battle field approvingly and replied:

"I trust so. No! There's one who still lives."

He walked toward Ed the bullwhacker.

"In God's mercy, don't kill any more!" screamed the girl.

DeLouge half turned and held up empty hands, then kneeled to examine the groaning man. Suddenly he seized the wretch by the arm and yanked him to his feet and, in great disgust, called out:

"This rat is barely hurt. Creased along the top of his shoulder." Then to the terrified bullwhacker. "You unspeakable——! Catch one of those horses and never let me see you again."

Groaning and yelping, the bullwhacker managed to secure Waggle's mount and climbed into the saddle. The last they saw of him he was drumming his heels and galloping down the Pueblo road.

"Please go into the house, ma'am," Goss begged of the girl.

She wanted to speak but her lips trembled, and without a word she ran to the house.

"Now, Nate, what in sin does all this shooting and killing mean?" demanded Ellis, not yet recovered from his amazement. "I saw men riding up to the house and opened the door. Then came a shot and I closed the door and jumped for a gun. From the window I recognized you. Then every one began shooting. I thought sure you was hit when you quit your horse. I fired at the man nearest the house, the one who rode toward Cañon City. But why did they come here and what did they want?"

Goss explained the situation fully. Ellis exclaimed:

"I can't expose Annie to danger like that! I'm no coward, but I can't run even a shadow of a chance of harm coming to her. And Moore's one of those who got away!"

"He'll never come back," assured DeLouge. "I know the breed. He didn't dare come this time without five to back him. The really dangerous ones are dead. They won't try it again. Now let's have a look."

He lead the way to Waggle, who had been shot between the eyes. They passed on to Black Bill, dragged some distance before his foot slipped free of the stirrup. He was shot through the heart.

"Only two out of six! What will Seth and Snap think of that? They could have done as well," muttered DeLouge.

"But neither of us is hurt and you creased the bullwhacker and wounded your third man. He could barely stick to the saddle when he rode off. Moore is badly hurt. I'll vouch for that. My third man ran for it without coming to close quarters. I think we've done well," Goss summed up.

"Good land! Mr. DeLouge is hurt. His trousers leg is bloody!" cried Ellis, glaring at the southerner's left leg.

"That was Waggle's first shot and he was shooting at random," explained DeLouge. "Didn't do any damage. I can walk."

"Into the house while we have a look at it," ordered Goss.

DeLouge demurred, not wishing to alarm the girl. But the two insisted and soon had him inside with his boot off and the trousers leg cut away at the knee. The bullet had cut a furrow across the side of his leg above the knee.

He was ashamed at the fuss made over it and was very apologetic to the girl, and would have pulled on his boot and gone outside had she not brought a basin of hot water and clean cloths. Then she motioned the men away and washed the wound.

"You mustn't bother, young lady," remonstrated DeLouge diffidently. "It's only a scratch. Amounts to nothing."

She said nothing until the wound was cleansed and dressed. Then she told him:

"I lied to you. I can't imagine what ever made me believe you were an enemy to Mr. Goss. But I did believe it and I lied. And you had seen the mule and knew all the time I had lied. I told my brother you could be very deadly, but that a woman needn't ever fear you. You didn't even let me know you had learned the truth by seeing that mule. I'm so glad to find I was mistaken. To know that you and Mr. Goss are friends! They talk about a woman's instinct. It's all foolishness, or just a catty disposition to suspect strangers. I'm ashamed of myself."

She turned away and came to a halt on beholding the silent figures outside. One moment they had been man-killing machines, and the next they were indifferent to all of earth for all time. Her nerves quite gave way. With a grimace of soul-sickness she ran into the other room and closed the door behind her, but she could not keep them from hearing the sound of her sobbing.

"Too —— bad we didn't kill the skunks out of sight of this house," muttered DeLouge. "——! But I can't stand this. I must get out. We must load them on horses. Fetch a shovel, young man. Then try to quiet your sister. It's horrible."

They loaded the dead men on horses, DeLouge riding and Goss walking as they moved down the road. For a mile they packed their victims toward Pueblo and even then were not satisfied until they had moved half a mile back from the road. For, as DeLouge said, it would not do to have reminders of the tragedy for the girl to behold when she went away from the ranch.

IT WAS midday when they returned to the ranch house. Dinner was ready but the girl did not sit down. She had recovered from her spell of weeping and appeared to be composed as she hovered about them, anxious to anticipate their wants. Nor did young Ellis have much of an appetite. When they had finished and the table was cleared Goss informed:

"No one will claim that horse out there. There's another that's running loose somewhere. You're welcome to both of them, Frank."

"No," Ellis sharply replied. "It's ended. "We want nothing to remind us of it."

"We'll take them back to Pueblo and turn them over to the sheriff. By rights it ought to be reported to the sheriff up at

Cañon," said DeLouge. "And I'm glad to see you're yourself again, young lady."

She shook her head and told him:

"It is very horrible. I thought I'd be contented to stay here quite a while. Now I feel different."

"You can go back to the river just as soon as you can catch a wagon-train out from Denver," spoke up Goss, his dark face bleak and hopeless. "You're not shut in here. The door is open. There's the wagon and nags that fetched you down here."

But DeLouge insisted:

"Go when and where you will, Miss Ellis, but don't misjudge the country because of what happened here this morning. There are just as many brutes east of the Mississippi. It was mighty unfortunate you had to go through this but it won't happen again. The territory is better off without those men. They had no redeeming qualities whatever. But you won't be bothered again if you live here many, many years."

"That's true, ma'am," eagerly agreed Goss. "Why don't you pay a visit to some of your neighbors till you work into a better frame of mind. Any of them will be mighty pleased to have you. Feel perfectly free to stay as long as you like, and no matter how long you stay they'll hate to have you leave them."

"There's Jesse Frazer!" cried Ellis. "He called on us. Offered every kindness. Wants to let us have hens and a cow or two. We can ride over there, Annie. If you don't think better of it after talking with him and his wife we'll go back East."

DeLouge went out to look after his horse. The girl timidly suggested—

"Why don't you stop here for awhile, Mr. Goss?"

"I'd like to. Better than anything else. But you won't need any protector. Frank is enough to scare all bad men away. Besides, no more of that breed will call here. Pueblo is still laughing over the way Frank handled Vince Moore. Moore will ride out of the country as fast as horseflesh can carry him. He'll never come up this road again. He didn't dare come this time until he had five to ride with him. Don't get the notion that every man out here is a ruffian. A bigger per cent. are honest, decent men than you'll find in the East."

"I don't think I'm afraid of anyone coming here again, bringing trouble. I feel upset over this morning's work. But I'm not afraid. I didn't mean that. You should settle down. At least take a vacation from your business."

"Gambling," he corrected. "I'm already planning something different. I may take a whack at mining next season."

"Good! I'll go with you," cried Ellis. "Only next season's a long ways off. Stay here and grow fat on Annie's cooking."

Goss glanced through the window at DeLouge who was waiting for him.

"By and by I'll come and visit for a few days. Just now I have an important matter to settle, one that DeLouge is interested in. You two visit the Frazers. If I come and you're not at home I'll ride over there and hunt you up."

The girl said nothing, but her brother was both curious and a bit envious.

"Is it mining, Nate. If so I might leave Annie with the Frazers and try it once more."

"Lead mine," replied Goss and still staring at DeLouge. "It won't pay. You'd be wasting your time. You'll see me or hear from me inside of two weeks. And I'd rather stay here right now than to hold four aces."

He abruptly shook hands with Ellis and the girl and hurried out and swung into the saddle.

Ellis and his sister followed the gambler and shook hands with DeLouge. He stared over their heads to the ridgepole of the house as the girl told him:

"You, too, are always welcome. Come and see us. We want you."

"You make me feel very proud," he told her, dropping his gaze. "I should prize your hospitality greatly. You are very brave and I wish you all sorts of good things. But the chances are you won't see me again, as I shall ride south immediately to fight for the Confederacy if my plans are not violently interrupted. Good-by."

He touched his horse and smartly galloped away. Goss waved his hand and rode to overtake him. In the road the gambler looked back and waved his hand again at the young couple, but DeLouge did not turn his head. They covered several miles in silence. Goss was the first to speak, saying:

"If I cash in they must never know the how of it. One of today's gang got me. I've spoken of my money and the ranch I own. That's the ranch I bought. They think the former owner is lending it to them."

DeLouge threw up his head and his lips twisted to one side in an ugly smile that disclosed some of his white teeth and asked—

"Why shouldn't they know it's your ranch?"

"Miss Ellis is sensitive. She wouldn't want to be beholden to me. Silly, of course, but she's lived all her life in an eastern village among the same type of people. She's a bit humiliated as it is. So as long as I live and she stays on the ranch she will never know."

DeLouge's head sank and for a few minutes he seemed lost in his meditations. Finally he asked—

"You think you have a good chance to get out of that fuss alive?"

"Excellent," assured Goss.

"—— your gall!" exploded DeLouge. "You seem to be honing mighty keen for that fight."

"You brought it to me and I'm ready. I don't hunt for trouble, but I can't afford to run away and always have it at my heels. We'll show down and one of us will take a new hand, t'other will drop out of the game."

"Keep your mouth shut, or we'll settle it right here in the road," warned DeLouge without raising his voice; and he spurred his horse into a furious gallop.

Goss maintained his steady pace and saw his opponent dwindle to a speck down the road, then disappear around a bend. He was jogging along, regretting what was before him when he suddenly found the road barred by DeLouge. Before he could speak the southerner reined to one side so that they were riding abreast and quietly advised:

"If you've bought a ranch for those two children, and if you have some money you want to give them, tote it to them yourself. I'm no —— errand boy. The young lady said I was 'deadly' to men I don't happen to like. I am. Deadly as ——. Keep that in the front of your mind and be careful what you talk."

Goss stared at him in perplexity and finally requested—

"Be so good as to hint just what subjects I can safely mention."

The twisted face smoothed out and despite the vicious scar, became almost handsome as DeLouge replied:

"Such as—how long it'll take me to make Texas, and just where I'm likely to pick up Seth and Snap."

"I don't get your meaning. I certainly don't want to start a row till your leg's all right, but——"

"It's as plain as your boots," interrupted DeLouge. "There's no fight between us. We had our duel when we took on three apiece. I bagged one and wounded two. One of your men got away unscratched. I won. You're licked."

And for the first time Goss heard DeLouge laugh in genuine amusement.

CHAPTER XI

GOSS TRIES A NEW GAME

HAVING once turned his thoughts to prospecting, Goss discovered he favored the idea. For two years he had lived in the gold camps and had felt rather a pitying contempt for the miners' rugged efforts. But now that he was believing his profession was passing from fashion, self-respect demanded a shifting of his point of view. So he came to decide that placer hunting and developing constituted the greatest gamble on the continent.

Many Coloradans were beginning to think the same. Eastern bankers having seen the gold pouring in from western mines were willing to take over mining properties. They prided themselves that by a mechanical system of exactness and by working on a larger scale they could show profits such as the original owners never dreamed of. The result of this trend was to make the original mine owners the most reckless and persistent of all speculators.

All the towns were talking shop. Innumerable stories of fortunes cleaned up over night by those who ceased to produce and lived only to trade. Pueblo gossiped as well as Denver. Goss' ears were filled with financial coups that made gambling gains appear as trifles.

He continued at the tables, however, although the old zest was gone. He had a feeling that he was closing out an unimportant business preliminary to sitting in the one big game on the continent. He played as shrewdly as ever but with the underlying thought of the golden adventure awaiting him in the spring. He made Pueblo his headquarters. But now that cards had ceased to be his obsession he picked his company more carefully. In Pueblo he won a reputation for being erratic.

He would drop into Allen's, or some similar resort, and after looking about suddenly announced he was not in the mood. On the other hand he made a trip to Taos after being told a man down there was a mighty gambler. The trip ate into his reserve fund to the extent of a thousand dollars. On the whole his luck held good and his poker sense grew even more astute. After the Taos trip he ceased plunging plays and steadily increased his winnings to something over five thousand dollars. All the while he lived with his old-time generosity.

It was shortly after the Taos trip that Jesse Frazer visited Pueblo. Having been told much about Goss by Frank Ellis he looked him up. Goss called it home news and was hungry to listen as long as Frazer would talk. They used up a long evening at Tommy Suttle's in discussing brother and sister and the prospects for making the ranch pay.

"They're young and they're smart enough, especially the girl," declared Frazer. "But I take it they have no binding arrangement as to occupying the ranch. Ancient Days is shiftless. Means well, but he may show up any time busted. Then they'd have him on their hands. If it wasn't for that I'd say they could make a mighty fine profit out of the place once they got crops in and were outfitted with stock and the like."

"Ancient Days will never bother them. They can have the ranch as long as they like. But that's just between you and me until I say different," said Goss.

Frazer gazed at him sharply and slowly nodded his head, and remarked:

"Good. Then they have a fine piece of property to develope. If they had some money they could shorten up the time of waiting. I had to start without even a house and plow with a stick."

"I'm a great believer in short cuts," said Goss.

He excused himself for a moment and soon returned with a thousand dollars in gold and gave the bag to Frazer, saying:

"You tell them that as a silent partner I'm contributing a thousand for seed, implements, hens and hen house, two or three cows with a suitable shelter or whatever your judgment finds they need most."

"Why, that'll fix them up handsome! You must be mighty fond of them."

"I scarcely know Miss Ellis. I'm very fond of Frank. I also consider it a good investment. Just so much the tables can't ever take away from me," said Goss.

In January Goss tired of Pueblo, or the narrow routine of his vacation. He rode up to Cañon City, and timed his journey so as to pass the ranchhouse long before sunrise. No smoke was rising from the chimney and the occupants slept on, little dreaming he was so near. He wanted to stop, at least long enough to speak to them a bit, but he put the temptation away and roughly informed his horse:

"None of that. We were to keep clear of them. They must have their chance to make their own play without us looking over their shoulders. But we'll drop in and say howdy when we ride back."

On reaching Cañon City he put up his horse and went to bed to make up his sleep. Late in the afternoon he went forth to hunt a big game and found it, and played with smashing success for half the night, then with the worst of luck until after sunrise. When he quit, heavy-eyed and weary, he was but a few dollars ahead for all his labor and shrewdness. At midnight he had been nearly two thousand ahead.

In grim derision he told himself—

"Could have made more by digging postholes."

HE SPENT much of the second day sleeping and he was surprized on awakening to find he was not impatient to get back to the table. This indifference annoyed him. He believed it augured bad luck. In a moody frame of mind he went to Hall's place and the moment he entered the saloon he was repaid for making the trip. Whip King, with whip in hand, was at the bar, entertaining several men with more or less truthful narratives.

On beholding Goss he startled the group by emitting a loud whoop. Then he rushed on the gambler, greeting him boisterously and dragging him to the privacy of a corner.

"Hall told me you was down Pueblo way. I was planning to go down and hunt you up," he began once they had the table and drinks between them. "If this ain't luck then a circle of a horsehair lariat won't stop a snake! But you look a bit thinner or older—darned if I know which. How's luck?"

"So, so. No kick. But perhaps I need to lay off the game awhile. Don't hanker for cards as I used to. Saw Euclid here three months ago. Know where he is?"

"Denver, or back East. Place for crazy folks is where he belongs," growled Whip King. "He was in Denver two weeks ago. That feller dis'pointed me. Saved him from a mob after he'd assayed a piece of grindstone to run a fortune in gold per ton, and picked him out for my work as a humdinger. He seemed to have such a way with him. Make folks think he was simple and just the kind to find out things I wanted to know. Then all he did was to get caught by Injuns. Promised to meet me in California Gulch and wandered off to be picked up by Injuns. He told me all about your doings among the Utes. As a detective he ain't worth a broken-legged steer."

"Detective?" gasped Goss, for once shaken out of his composure.

Whip King grinned and explained:

"Ordnance Department of the Army of the Frontier hired me to round up some of the cusses who was running off lots of stock, also them who're passing counterfeit money, running guns into Texas, and such tricks. You never knew how close young Ellis came to being snagged."

"You a detective!" repeated Goss. "Eights and aces! Wonder you didn't arrest me. And why didn't you arrest Ellis in Denver?"

"Maybe I should have. But I wasn't interested in who killed Skillings. He oughter been killed long before. And I didn't believe the youngster did it. But if I'd believed he was working with Skillings in passing counterfeit money I'd a nabbed him quick enough."

"And Euclid was working for you?"

"I thought he was," grumbled Whip King. "He had spells when I'd swear he was a jim-dandy for my work. That fool way of his would let him in anywhere. But he couldn't keep his eyes on the wagon rut. Too much dreaming. So he quit, and I've shifted over to work for the quartermaster of the Denver post. I shouldn't be breathing a word of this to you, but sometimes I feel I'll bust if I don't tell some one something. And I know you're close-mouthed. Just now I'm keen to find Vince Moore, Bill Waggle and Black Bill. They're wanted for lifting stock and passing bogus money, running guns south, and a few other things."

"It's plain you haven't been asking many questions here in Cañon," mused Goss.

"Just been old Whip King, about to take a wagon train back to the River," chuckled Whip King.

"The affair has been kept mighty quiet," continued Goss. "Their friends haven't made a yip, and my friends haven't. Moore is probably in Old Mexico. He headed for there. If you trail the two Bills till you find them you'll have to ride about eight miles down the valley and turn in from the road. With their boots on."

Then he satisfied Whip King's consuming curiosity by recounting the fight at the ranch.

"Life and grief!" exclaimed Whip King, softly pounding his big fist on the table. "Why, Nathan, you oughter be hired by the quartermaster to just go round and kill off bad characters. Look here, Nathan, you come with me. We'll be a team with an ugly dog under the wagon."

"No. It's good work and must be done, but I wouldn't like it," refused Goss. "Just now I'm thinking of taking a whack at placer mining."

"Placer-mining? Bah! It's seen its best days. If you hanker to git into that, you should a started two years ago when you was playing the different camps. Besides, it ain't your game. You'll just cut open a dog if you try it and end up by waiting on some one's grub table like young Ellis did."

"I think I shall try it. If I have bad luck I can at least say I'm a miner and gambler when folks ask what's my business."

Whip King slowly swallowed his drink and conceded:

"If it takes you out of the gambling business it'll be worth while even if you never find anything except slate and cactus. Anyway, your news saves me a trip to Pueblo, which I don't hanker to visit. The last time I was there the postmaster had set a barrel of mail out in the road to show he had quit. Only difference between quitting and holding the job was about ten feet. When postmaster he dumped the mail on the floor of his shebang and left it for folks to paw over and take what they wanted. When he quit he moved it into the road."

"Now what about Frank Ellis? Are they still looking for him?" asked Goss.

"Land, no! Some rumpus when he didn't show up to testify against that Leaper. Had to let Leaper go. He went up north.* Now he's forgotten.

He can go back to Denver anytime and no one will bother him."

Goss did not show much elation at this piece of news. "I'll tell him when I ride down the valley," he simply said. "He and his sister will be glad to pull out, I believe. As to prospecting, it's largely a notion. I mayn't think well of it when the season opens. Getting so I'm about sick of everything."

"You come along with me," urged Whip King. "I can dish up more excitement for you in a day than you'll find in a year at the card table or in hunting for the gold that ain't there. Fighting corral all the time, heads to the center. Since I saw you last I've been in places that's worse'n the bite of a Platte mosquito. And one of them can kill a mule. Game on tonight? I might sit in. And how long are you stopping here?"

"I'm riding early in the morning, Whip King. If I change my mind and want to join you I'll look you up. As to a game, I'm feeling out of luck just now."

Whip King laughed loudly and jeered:

"Out of luck? Don't feel like playing? Why, time it gits dark you'll refuse a hand just like the wind will stop whistling over Pike's Peak. But for profit and from a business point of view it'll pay you better to rob stages. I'm inclined to think I'd rather take my chance at holding up a stage than to know that sometime I'd be a broken-down gambler."

He rose and Goss got to his feet and with a nod made for the door.

"See you tonight," Whip King called after him.

They did not meet that night, however, as Goss retired early and was in the saddle at sunrise. He did much sober thinking as he covered the six miles to the ranch, for he found he had something of a fight to wage. The Ellis's were remaining on the ranch from fear for Frank's safety. Goss tried to persuade himself the young man was better off where he was than to be returning penniless to the east. Once the girl knew her brother stood in no danger she would be quick to quit the territory.

The two were at breakfast when he rode up to the door and cheerily called out. He barely had time to notice a long hen house, and a cow hovel beyond the horse corral before brother and sister were out the door to greet him.

"Hullo, partner," joyously saluted Ellis. "Come in! Come in! Thanks to you we've made a fine start."

The girl gave him her hand and boasted:

"All the fresh eggs you can eat. Not common eggs, but ranch eggs."

She appeared to be genuinely pleased to see him, and after they had entered the house she proudly pointed to a blank-book, neatly made from wrapping paper, and invited:

"Accounts of the firm. Open to inspection. Look it over when you've eaten. Mr. Frazer says this is a good business proposition and that you'll get your money back with good interest. So we accepted it. We had to accept it as he said he didn't know where you were or how the money could be returned. He did the buying for us."

"That's fine. It's the one good investment I ever made," heartily declared Goss.

"Only trouble is the chance that Ancient may want the place back any time. If we could lease it for a term of years with the privilege of buying we'd feel safer," spoke up Ellis.

"I'll guarantee Ancient won't bother you. He hasn't any use for crops," assured the gambler. "We'll fix it to buy when the time's ripe."

"You're to put no more money into the ranch," hastily interrupted the girl. "And no more business talk till you've eaten. Draw up a chair. Coffee is hot. Bacon and eggs hot. I do the cooking so you must praise it."

Goss ate with much gusto but had a poor appetite for a man riding six miles to his breakfast. After he had finished he suddenly informed them:

"Frank isn't wanted for anything. Met his and my friend, called Whip King, at Cañon City yesterday. He's working for the government at weeding out rascals from the territory. He says Frank can go back to Denver, go anywhere, and that no one will trouble him. I'm mighty pleased to be able to bring such good news."

TO BE CONTINUED

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*Montana. Hanged for robbing an Indian agent. Rockafellow's History of Fremont Co., Col.

STEAM PIRACY

by R. W. Knight

PERHAPS the most curious, picturesque and only attempt at steam piracy was made by a Mexican boat, the *Marquis de la Habana*, commanded by a Mexican general. In the annals of history it is the only case of steam piracy known.

A Mexican general, by the name of Miramon, acting as the principal representative of the Mexican Conservative party, chartered at Havanna the former slave ship *Marquis de la Habana*.

The original plan of this Mexican and his friends was to land at Vera Cruz and bring about a revolution, a semi-annual affair in that country.

Unfortunately for Miramon, when his steamer appeared off Vera Cruz and declined to show the flag of any recognized country, the United States fleet, then cruising in Mexican waters, forbade him to land. This unforeseen interference placed Miramon in a distressing situation. He had but little capital and his crew were already clamoring for the generous wages promised them.

However he or some other ingenious person aboard brought forward a plan that would easily make them wealthy with no great risk to themselves.

Their steamship the *Marquis de la Habana* was a boat of about six hundred tons and armed with a modern brass rifled twenty-four-pound pivot and one or two old fashioned thirty-two-pounders; a ship so armed could easily carry out their plans and make a speedy and successful exit.

Their plan was to stop and plunder one of the California "treasure" steamers, carrying large quantities of gold from California to New York. This was all before the building of trans-continental railroads. The gold was shipped to Panama from San Francisco by boat; across the Isthmus by rail to Aspinwall; from there to New York by one of Col. Vanderbilt's side-wheel steamers. There were few ocean cables in those days of 1860, so that to broadcast the news and trace the pirates would be a difficult task.

The crew of the *Habana* eagerly accepted the new standard offered them. They were, at best, the motley riffraff of the Southern ports.

But the Fates were against them. In some way, probably by treachery, Commander Javvis of the U. S. sloop-of-war, *Saratoga*, was informed of the plot. He immediately set forth in search of them.

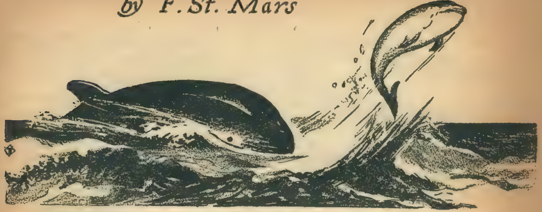
On March 6th the *Saratoga* sighted the *Marquis de la Habana* anchored off Point Anton Lizordo. Miramon attempted to escape; was overtaken and ordered to surrender. He answered by firing twice from his pivot gun. At this declaration of hostilities the *Saratoga* gave them a broadside. The contest ended in a short while, Miramon surrendering. Some twenty Mexicans were killed and wounded. Many escaped ashore in small boats.

The *Saratoga* placed a prize crew aboard the *Marquis de la Habana* and sent her to New Orleans, "as being a pirate on the high seas."

It is doubtful if Miramon and his confederates were jailed, for General Miramon was later a staunch supporter of Emperor Maximilian during his short reign in Mexico.

Wolves of the Sea

by F. St. Mars



Author of "Wild Gas," "Puck's Broken Parole," etc.

DARKNESS lay on the face of the waters still, although far away down in the east it was quite bright. At some considerable distance an unseen ship was still showing her lights, which twinkled and glimmered steadily. From time to time a black form, "like some great uncouth bat," a cormorant in point of fact, flapped heavily seaward over the mighty, steady, breathing heaves that represented calm to the ocean in that place. From half a mile away or so, where the cliffs reared sheer a stupendous black rampart to the seas and the mountains tumbled down to the shore, came deep, cavernous, sullen gurglings, moanings, loud thunders and awful long-drawn sighs, as the breakers broke in spume and lost themselves among the giant caves. Those were the only sounds upon the face of the waters, and away from them a mighty silence, the all-pervading, mysterious, brooding silence of the sea lay over all.

Then suddenly, so suddenly that a cormorant passing in carelessly low flight at that moment coughed out a quick hollow grunt of terror, the black, glassy surface of the sea broke in a glimmer of spray, as there rose and uprose, as it were a column of marble, a great, tapering, torpedo-shaped, living, shining body of ghostly white perhaps twenty, or it may have been twenty-two, or four or more, feet long—but I do not know, because no one was ever found who dare measure it.

For a moment it hung there, balanced, poised, with the snarl and seethe of the water falling from it all around, ere, with an awful, soulless, yearning, hungry sigh it curved and, in one superb rolling plunge, vanished from sight. It was a grampus, or "killer," or officially the terrible and dread *Orca Gladiator*—wolf of the seas.

There followed a pause of perhaps five minutes, and then, going at extraordinary speed, a form, glistening and wet, like that of some big fish, but it was a porpoise really, shot literally from the surface into the air, curved, hit the water again and vanished.

Close behind it, seething with the terrific speed at which it cut the waves, a high, straight, simitar-like, jet-black vertical fin shot along the surface and vanished also. But instantly almost again the porpoise broke into sight, darted along the surface with one last flurry and leaped for its life as a huge, blunt, round, smooth, jet-black and shining head with wicked, perfectly cruel little eyes, no visible ears and only a longish oval patch of spotless, flashing white behind its eyes to relieve its ebon hues, shot up beneath it with enormous mouth agape.

There was one single appalling clash as the great jaws shut; a spurt of blood; the mighty, odd-shaped blunt head turned over, the high, cutting back fin cut a little white frill of foam upon the dark waves for a second or two and—nothing.

Both creatures, both beasts—for they were animals, or more strictly mammals, with hot blood in their veins, and breathing through their noses, same as us, for all their fishy appearance—had vanished entirely.

One of them, the porpoise, had vanished forever from this world, for at a single snap the black monster of the deep had eaten him alive.

But he was not gone, that monster, for in a minute he was up again and undulating with a wonderful long, swift, switch-back motion along the surface, all twenty-odd feet of him, and then it was seen that he was not all black, but only black above water-line, and below water-line was white with that wonderful whiteness which only creatures of the sea know, and with a curious white fluke mark curving forward and up behind the large, rounded flippers.

He was, in fact, the grampus, as indeed his speed attested, for few there are that can match the wolf of the sea in speed on the face of the deep.

He was heading inshore toward the towering cliffs and in a very few minutes, as he swerved and began to work his way along the foot of them—only his high knife-like back fin and the horizontally set, not vertically as in fishes, flukes of his tail showing above water—one began to guess why. His purpose was a bad one as the purpose of the dread killer always is.

The light was increasing slightly, and one or two gulls, specters floating overhead, had begun to appear and here and there a little black guillemot, his wings whirring and the white half-moon on them winking with alternate exposure and eclipse, was flying low out to sea to dive and fish. Once a snowy white fulmar petrel—that big cousin of the little stormy petrel—poised ghost-like and in dead silence above the tell-tale high, sharp back-fin cutting the water as its owner hunted swiftly along.

Even a back-fin can give expression; it can speak, it seemed. That menacing, shark-like, upright, pointed appendage spoke. It was evidently looking for something, hunting up and down like a wolf on a trail, for something it knew was there. At any rate, that was the impression it gave, and I fancy the impression was right.

Then suddenly it stopped, and the great rounded blunt head of its owner came up, with its gleaming white throat, its white patches behind the eyes. Then, as the swell lifted him, the little wicked eyes of the killer got a clear view of what was ahead.

He beheld a big, amphitheater-like inlet among the cliffs, several wet slabs of rock, lifted above the swell, shining in the new light, and upon them, lying lazily, dozing on their sides, on their backs, anyhow, any way, except the orthodox one of the picture books, were perhaps a dozen common seals. Another seal was in the water, apparently sound asleep, coming up from and going down to the bottom like a lemon pip in a glass of lemon squash, and another seal was in the water playing with a bunch of sea-weed like a kitten.

In the center of the picture was a great bloated, whiskered beast—great only if the killer was not by—straight on end, with his enormous puffed muzzle pointing to heaven, bobbing like a bottle. Beside the common seals he was a giant. Beside the killer he was—not a giant.

The books say great gray seals off British coasts run to six feet long, but this blown out creature would never see six feet again, although he must have been a great gray seal.

In one swift glance the killer took in the scene, marked his prey, the great gray seal, gave his peculiar sidelong roll, and dived—sounded.

THROUGH the foggy green depths, still as if petrified, lighted only by a circle of dazzling gold above, the terrible killer hurled his mighty bulk along in the form of a gigantic luminous bubble, a wonderful shadowy, shooting, hurtling, shapeless something, silent as all things under the sea are silent—as death itself.

He reached the location under his prey and curved up like some enormous flash, undulating always with body and horizontally fluked tail in that method of swimming peculiar to all the whale and dolphin people. His great rounded muzzle showed for a moment above the surface, and then, as he rolled over and darted down, his big flipper flashed—"finning," they call this—in the sun. He had missed. The great gray seal was not there.

Ahead, leading straight down to the black mouth of a mighty cavern in the cliffs, a train of silver bubbles ran, and they were the track of his prey, warned apparently in some inexplicable way of his presence. He could follow him there if he liked, and he did not like. No pounding about by breakers in spiky sea grottos for him. He was too big for that.

Without a fraction of a second's pause he swerved and, with amazing speed that he had never checked, in fact, dashed to the mouth of the inlet, shooting straight across it. A cod, like a blob of light streaked with a silver flash as it turned from his path; a cormorant, diving for breakfast, darted off at a tangent like a magnified black pearl, and then a luminous green bottle—at least it looked like that, but it was a seal—went down, as a shooting star falls, below him.

Then it was seen what is the full meaning of the speed of the killer in the water. The huge, expressionless animal merely quickened the undulations of his tail and of his whole body, simply switch-backed the more violently through the mysterious, still, cold, green underworld, and he literally flew along, so that the speed of the seal—and that same seal had hunted down a salmon, mark you, in fair chase not an hour before—seemed pitifully inadequate before him.

But how can I describe to you how that poor hunted seal dodged, how flashed, how turned, how darted, only in the end to be remorselessly overtaken for the tenth time and engulfed in one awful chop of the great jaws. Then there was—well, only the half of a seal, sinking to the bottom. A second chop, and there was no seal at all.

After that the wolf of the seas headed steadily out to the offing, till, when about a quarter of a mile out, he was joined, first by one, then another, then other killers, rising mysteriously simply from nowhere, and falling in his wake, spouting and blowing like jets of vapor in the cold air, as their great leader, for leader he appeared to be, taking no more notice of them—horribly expressionless creatures they are—than if they had been bits of floating seaweed, headed steadily Northwest.

There were eight killers in that herd. They call it herd but that is an absurd term, and 'pack' would be better; some were about thirteen, some fifteen, one twenty, and the great old leader over twenty feet long. Apparently they had sent their leader in to beat prey away from the rocks, for them, apparently, but what was the real truth I do not pretend to know.

The pack now traveled swiftly and fairly straight, either undulating through and over the waves more or less on view, or else just below the surface when only their high, sharp shark-like back-fins showed. Occasionally the whole pack would sound and go down still undulating, always undulating, in fact, so far as I could see, so that it seemed practically their only motion, and gave them a strange appearance of having arms imprisoned and of taking part, as it were, in a perpetual sack race.

This appearance of being enclosed in a sack and of ceaselessly struggling to get out of it is characteristic of these wonderful fish who are not fish, who with their limbs forever imprisoned in their own skin yet outswim the very fish themselves.

As for the seals, they are quite different, of course.

When the pack went down in this way it scattered, and there invariably followed a great commotion and silvery flashing and darting of fish. Each killer then chased what it could on its own for a minute or two, snapping up great cod, flounder and halibut many pounds in weight, as if they were but a mouthful, which they were, but invariably returning to the surface again to fall each into his allotted place in the line of the pack to continue the steady, swift, northward journey.

Once they came into a mighty sound, booming and thundering over the pathless deep, as if warships were carrying out big gun practise there, or as if a gigantic landslide were taking place somewhere unseen. So tremendous were the colossal roaring sounds that the human ear even, which is comparatively dull, would have heard them plainly several miles away, and the killers apparently heard them farther or quite as far.

Naturally one expected them to give the vicinity of that stupendous booming their entire room, but, strangely enough, they did not. On the contrary, in fact, the old leader swung his great round nose round till it was pointing direct west-northwest, which is to say, straight toward the din, and he headed in that direction, followed by the rest, at speed—if not at full speed, for I do not know whatever full speed a killer is capable of putting up.

Swiftly, therefore, they came up to the uproar, which at close quarters was deafening. And no wonder, for there before them, alone with Nature and stupendous, was a school of whales, leaping high and straight, clear out of the water into the air and falling back with a thunder and upheaval that shook the very air, and, well, those whales did not measure more than between sixty and seventy feet long, most likely.

It was nothing to them, this hurling of sixty-five feet of blubber, skin and bone, weighing heaven alone knows how many tons, high into the air with the agility and abandon of a salmon.

It was nothing to the killers. They saw that the whales were common rorquals, or fin-whales, and that there were plenty of them, so they sheered off and left them alone, rorquals being mighty active beasts, not so inclined to surrender to fate and their enemies as most. But to us the phenomenon seems wonderful enough.

ONCE, too, about two hours later, they came upon four seals—fall-outs from a big traveling herd—swimming together. The seals went straight away, often getting along over the surface like a thrown pebble playing ducks and drakes, and at really amazing speed; and twice they dived to an enormous depth, but they had not such thick, oily blubber to withstand the great cold and greater pressure as the relentlessly pursuing killers had, and were forced to come up. In the end, therefore, they scattered, as their last chance, and two of them, leaping high again and again, like pursued fish in desperation, were swum down and torn to pieces by the ravenous wolves of the sea.

Once, also, but that was way along toward the afternoon—for time did not seem to count with these emotionless beasts that traveled and traveled like so many engines, a peculiarity of their tribes, and a habit they were doomed to from birth to death—once also, I say, the air began gradually to get colder. It had not been anything within reach of warm, anyway, but now it began to get cruel and nobody seemed to feel surprized when there opened up, towering and glistening, white, blue, tremendous and indescribably mysterious, an iceberg.

The old leader of the killers, directly the cold in air and water warned him, had altered course toward it, and now he was taking a hungry view of the wonder from the top of every swell he crested. It was some iceberg, too.

A nearer inspection and a careful scout round two sides of the dazzling walls—oh, that bitter water and that knife-like blast—revealed to him the fact that the berg was inhabited by three polar bears and a dozen or two gulls. It had evidently but lately broken away from pack-ice off a land promontory, and would soon strand off another, no doubt, and some of the pack ice lay floating close by, and upon that pack ice were twenty and one seals.

At least, there were twenty-and-one seals when the old killer and his gang—represented solely by warning high, pointed back-fins—first appeared out of the depths. One of the bears, however, essayed a beautiful stalk upon the seals of the pack ice and, swimming across mostly under water, captured one neatly. He was returning to the berg with his prize when things went wrong and events began to happen somehow.

The knowing seals suddenly trailed past him in mad panic, going like the wind, all but four who wisely pulled out on to the ice at once, and he, after one look below the the surface, swam for that iceberg as he had seldom swum before.

He reached the iceberg, all right, moving at a great rate, with the peculiar round nose of the old killer a dozen yards behind his apology for a tail! Also he began to scramble up, was scrambling up, in fact, and had, to all intents and purposes, got beyond possible argument, when the great black and gleaming nose of the killer shot up and, heaving his great body on end, with one ponderous, convulsive spring, grabbed the bear by one hind leg.

Now polar bears do not admit suzerainty where they live and this bear was a big one. Also the polar bear is about the biggest proposition in the claw and tooth line of all the bears.

There followed an awful roaring, growling, wrenching, tearing, splashing inferno, as the bear, fighting as only a polar bear can, every inch of the way, came down slowly, sliding in a small avalanche of ice and snow and a fog of spray. What he might have done single handed, or pawed perhaps I should say, against the grampus, is nothing but guesswork—a big chunk out of the latter's blubber, and two red-hot claw scrapes seemed to suggest that he would not have died easily—but it did not matter anyway.

There was a gleaming flash of white, a snap, an awful growling howl; another of equally gleaming black, another snap, another and more awful growling howl. That represented two more killers rising on end to help their leader. Then all vanished together in one fearful, churned-up, frothing, red boil, which lapped at the ice and dissolved to a smother of pink foam, which calmed to bottle-green, crimson-flecked. Then, one after the other, the killers began to come to the surface, gripping chunks of polar bear, and diving again—"lob tailing," they call it—for more.

An hour later, the ominous pirate back-fin of the big killer rose to and cut along the surface far from the iceberg, and alone. He was traveling very fast and with suggestive purposefulness. Behind him a pink streak dyed the jade green waves occasionally. The gap in his great cheeks which the dying bear's fangs had torn, although nothing to worry about to such a beast as he, was bleeding still somewhat, and there had been a tendency on the part of the next largest grampus of the herd, a twenty-foot male, to lead the others to turn upon him.

They would not have chanced it themselves, at least not with one so strong and so slightly injured. Only, excited with blood lust as they were at the moment, this rival for leadership of the herd—and incidentally, the possession of the pick of the killer "flappers"—*might* have induced the rest to back his attack.

Wherefore the old grampus, descending suddenly like a stone to an enormous depth, had given them the slip in the pit-like blackness, tremendous pressure and appalling still cold down below, and was heading now northwestward alone, hoping probably that they were not following the blood trail and keeping up a speed o' knots till that same blood trail should cease.

Naturally he was not in the best of tempers and, of course, he was hungry. Never, indeed, have I known him when he was not hungry, and rarely in a sweet mood.

FOR one or both of these reasons, perhaps, he turned from his course half a point to investigate a small sailing ship that lay, all sails set, careening gaily away off between him and the setting sun, but she looked like a cluster of rosy pearls. A school of about a dozen common long-beaked dolphins were careering jovially round the shroud-purpled bows of the ship—for your common dolphin is ever a companionable and light-hearted creature—the largest of them boasting perhaps seven and a half feet from beak-tip to fluke tail-tip.

And it seemed to the killer that one of these would be an altogether desirable meal—or course, rather—for though armed with many teeth, what is a six or seven foot playful dolphin to the awful hunger fury of a twenty-and-the-rest-foot killer?

The killer ceased to exist for a space, till he reappeared in the shape of that hated, dreaded, perpendicular fin point—loathed nearly wherever seas flow—hissing through the bottle-green waves, straight as a ruled line toward an outlying, or out-sporting, dolphin.

The dolphin, "breaching"—leaping out of the water—at that moment, saw his doom coming and promptly let out for the stern of the ship, sounding—just as a bird pursued by a falcon towers to a height—to a good depth as he went.

The killer followed and was too quick for him though. The terrific speed of the killer's hurtling rush beat even the torpedo-like velocity of the dolphin and headed him back to the surface, where he breached again only just in time to save himself from his foe's merciless chopping jaws.

The grampus was just about to breach too, when something happened which made him "round"—roll to go down—with a suddenness that set the water hissing behind.

The whining song of a bullet passing close above his head, and the butting, smacking clap of a rifle report from the sailing vessel came almost together.

Now once, long ago—goodness and himself alone know however long ago it must have been—the old killer had been wounded by a rifle bullet, and he had never forgotten the bang and the excruciating pain that accompanied that episode. He spun like a top, therefore, and hurtled away headlong, only to charge all but full tilt into—! Great flukes and mighty flippers! What, in the name of Father Neptune himself, was this?

It seemed as if an island or half the sea-bed or some little trifle of that kind had chosen that moment to rise very suddenly and very swiftly right smack under his round nose. It was not so much a mass, it was a mountain, dark bluish gray, shining and *alive*.

The killer, going astern and porting his helm hard, so to speak, watched it come up, foot after foot, yard after yard, ten feet after ten feet. One twelve-foot monster that was only a flipper of the miracle came up and over, sending him—*him*, the big one, mind you—scuttling out of its way as it struck the water with a crash that might have scattered his brains.

The mighty Greenland whale, giant of the frozen Arctic, the killer had seen and the monster sperm, or cachelot, hugest thing that grows out of the huge Pacific he had set eyes on, but neither of these, though they dwarfed all else known, showed tremendous after the fashion of this stupendous leviathan.

It was not a whale at all; it was a super-whale. As a matter of fact, though—what a poky, every-day little beggar fact is—it rejoiced in the style and title, full and official, of Sibbald's Whale—*balænoptera Sibbaldi*—the sulfur-bottom of the whalers.

This conveys nothing of what the old grampus saw rising monstrously above the lapping swell there before him, except that whoever Mr. Sibbald may have been, his discovery must have given him a wondrous fright, and made him wonder if his brain was going. In point of truth, that old grampus beheld, lying there along the green, lapping water, casting a far-reaching and terrible shadow in the light of the setting sun, eighty-six and a half feet of whale, living and alive—eighty-six and one-half English feet. Got it? Some animal, aye?

The miracle had been following that ship for twenty-one days. Goodness knows what for. Perhaps to capsize her, which would have been bad, and has been done by smaller, though great, whales before. Perhaps to make love to her—which would have been a good deal worse. I know not; nor did the captain and crew of the ship. They did not get nervous, you understand. Oh, dear me, no. They only longed ardently for the absence of that living volcano. They even fired at it with a rifle—as the old killer knew, nearly to his cost—had fired at it repeatedly, but to no purpose. No, of course not. As well shoot a hippopotamus with an air gun and very much more safely.

And it was at that awkward and precise moment that the herd or school or pack, or whatever you please to call it, of the killers, led by the rival twenty footer, hot on the trail of our wicked old friend, chose to turn up.

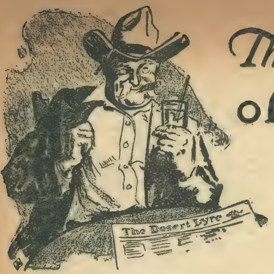
The runaway old leader had no delusions. He turned, rounded and went straight at the white and gleaming belly—but it looked green and neutral under water—of his foe, and that foe, that rival, taken a little by surprize at the fury of his headlong rush, was forced to breach.

It was a pretty shot, and killers are not beloved, even by sailormen. The mountain named after Mr. Sibbald had made the owner of the rifle a laughing stock, and he was only too glad to do some good with a bullet or two. The little projectile, going at something over a thousand feet per seccond—that is to say, just ahead of the sound of the report that went with it—hit the long, gleaming column of the leaping grampus fair on the side, with a nasty, thick, perfectly audible *thtt*.

Then that killer heeled over, and went down in a cloud of spray, just as the biggest of all the whales began to round and spout a vapory column as high, it seemed, as the masts. And the old killer went down with his rival—down, down, down; past green fog and cod; past twilight and cuttle-fish; past pale night and nameless shadows; to black, black, night, nameless cold and gray-white slime.

AND when the old killer eventually appeared once more upon the sea's surface, he was alone. Gory he was, and fearful to look upon, but he was alone and fearless.

The mighty whale had sunk, the herd of killers were scattered, chasing still more scattered dolphins, and there was nothing on the seas, or under the seas, to prevent the old reprobate of a killer from eloping shoreward with the brightest hued, and most shapely of all the flapper killers, which he did.



The Setting of Sunrise

by Alex. McLaren

Author of "A Rimrock Judas," "Scrambled Brains," etc.

SUNRISE came into existence during those hectic days of mining madness when the mere report of one rich assay sufficed to mushroom a town on to the map over night. But no town, boom or otherwise, can subsist indefinitely upon a wildcat diet. The rich assay was never duplicated, people left like rats forsaking a leaky ship, and Sunrise was doomed to a place among the ghost towns of the West.

A few remained to take pot luck with the bats, rattlers and other denizens of the desert in possession of crumbling shacks and wind-swept streets. Some remained for reasons purely sentimental—most certainly not based upon good judgment; others lacked the funds to move with; and others, too lazy to stir out in search of new diggings, followed the lines of least resistance in the chairs on Reagan's saloon porch from morning till night. All formed a little band of hope and looked to "Colonel Blevins" for council and leadership.

The Colonel was sole owner, editor and general factotum of *The Desert Lyre*, a sheet which had been moved to and from, and had lied in, half the boom camps of Nevada, until now its few fonts of type and its clanky old press fairly shuddered at the sight of a desert freighter.

Colonel Blevin's right to the title was never fully explained, unless by the gentleman's weakness for blending old bourbon with the juice of crushed mint, his Southern accent and, in the absence of old bourbon, a somewhat truculent nature. The inhabitants let it go at that and asked no question. Any man with those characteristics has a perfect right to be addressed as Colonel.

The slump caught him long on printing supplies and short on cash, too short to consider moving. He accepted the big frog in the little puddle philosophy as his excuse for remaining, and tried to convince himself and every one he came in contact with that Sunrise would be brought into the fold of production, but through the agency of *The Desert Lyre* only.

He kicked "Sleepy" Wilson's dog out of the line of march, and paraded his two hundred and odd pounds of pomposity up and down the length of Reagan's saloon porch. As usual, the Colonel was in an oratorical mood.

"Gentle—men," he said to the hopeful and ever present assembly, "advertising—the judicious application of printer's ink only will allay this civic decay. The proudest day of my life will be when I can stand here and point out countless tall hoisting-frames dotting the skyline, hear on every hand stamp mills thundering out their story of prosperity, and be able to say, 'Gentle—men, see what *The Desert Lyre* has done for Sunrise.' "

He spouted on for half an hour couching the same sentiment in many phrases. Deep down in his own mind he did not believe one-tenth of what he said, but he enjoyed listening to himself and noting the expressions of awe on the faces of his audience.

"The Setting of Sunrise," copyright, 1925, by Alex. McLaren.

Perspiration oozed from his forehead, ran down in a stream and dripped from the end of a bulbous nose. Feeling the need of additional moisture he strode inside, followed by the crowd, where he disposed of a brimming glassful of "Reagan's Best" with gulping effort and a shudder, and inwardly cursed the temporary dearth of mint in Sunrise.

Bill Trotter, owner of the only remaining assay office in town, plucked at the Colonel's sleeve and noddingly indicated a table and empty chairs in the corner.

"That advertising talk made a hit with me, Colonel," said Bill after they were seated with the table between them. "It gave me a pippin of an idea."

The Colonel smiled condescendingly.

"It is the only method, Mistah Trottah, by which our vast unexplored area of mineral wealth can be brought to the notice of moneyed men, sah. Now, with *The Desert Lyre*——"

Bill checked him.

"Never mind about *The Desert Lyre*, Colonel; I've heard that old spiel of yours before. I believe you'd sing it if you had it set to music. I'm thinking seriously of placing some advertising with you."

If Bill's rebuff had raised the Colonel's ire, the last words certainly allayed it. The Colonel reared back against the wall, slapped his knee and beamed on the shifty-eyed Bill.

"Your ardor, Mistah Trottah, is highly commendable. Would that we had more of your kind in our indolent midst, sah. More public-spirited citizens like yourself, sah, welded into a unit and—er—backed by the prestige of *The Desert Lyre*, sah, and Sunrise would——"

Again Bill checked him. This time impatiently.

"Get me right, Colonel; get me right. I'm not one —— bit interested in the future of Sunrise. What interests me is getting out of here *pronto*. I'm going to advertise my place for sale."

The Colonel brought his chair down from a leaning position against the wall with a bang. He stiffened.

"It pains me, Mistah Trottah," came tinged with indignation, "to discover in you an apostate, a back-slider, a traitor to our civic cause, sah."

He leaned forward, shaking one pudgy finger at Bill, and continued:

"Do you not realize that in the rehabilitation of Sunrise, an assay establishment is a necessity? I will say a necessity second only to—er—*The Desert Lyre*."

Bill grinned and tapped the old man's arm.

"Keep your shirt on, Colonel. Don't get all fussed up now. I'm not like the rest of these human buzzards in this town. I've got money to pay for my ad, and I don't want no ordinary little notice sandwiched in between patent-medicine ads. I want a big display that'll make some sucker sit up and take notice. I want to sell, and I want to sell bad is what I mean."

He leaned closer to the Colonel, reduced his voice to a whisper and continued:

"I'll not only pay you regular rates, but you help me to put through any deal the ad stirs and I'll give you a good cut. We'll go in partners."

The Colonel's injured mien softened. He had a flexible mind; one which circumstances could bend in any direction on short notice. He was mercenary and the sound of a cash payment was as balm to an injured ear.

"Well, after all, Mistah Trottah," he began with measured effort, "it might be for the best. Your successah might be more in accord with the progressive spirit of Sunrise. The change would certainly make matters no worse, sah."

After half an hour of low conversation, in which the Colonel's pencil and pad figured largely, they got up and headed for the bar. Bill slapped the Colonel's back and whispered—

"You break the news to them."

Bill Trotter was crafty, with conscientious scruples a minus quantity in his equation. He did not care so much about the ad in *The Desert Lyre*, but he did care about having the Colonel and the "human buzzards" he controlled as help in cinching a sale when the "sucker" did arrive. He had a method in his apparent madness.

The Colonel downed another drink and faced the loungers.

"Gentle—men!" he began his announcement. "It is with the deepest regret Mistah Trottah informs me that owing to his fast failing health, he is forced to offer his business for sale."

The Colonel paused. Some one snickered. No one in the assembly had ever known Bill Trotter to be afflicted with anything more than an abnormal appetite for liquid refreshments.

"Now, gentle—men, Mistah Trottah has long been a public benefactor in our midst, and it behooves us to give him our united support in the disposal of his place. The exact manner in which you can aid will be explained to you more thoroughly later when—er—a possible purchaser arrives."

An hour later Colonel Blevins was busy down in *The Desert Lyre* shack setting up the largest display ad the paper had featured in many moons. Many of his old subscription list had left forwarding addresses, and the Colonel still had hopes.

IN A San Francisco cellar, in an alley just off Montgomery Street, dust-covered incandescents made a feeble attempt at illumination. The combined fumes of nitric and hydrochloric acids and ammonia filled the air. Chemical apparatus cluttered the shelves and a hydrocarbon furnace roared in one corner. Just out of heat range, but close enough to watch the volatile lead oxide curling up from cupels in the muffle, sat Lem Godfrey. His attention was divided between the furnace and a newspaper spread out on his knee.

Lem hailed from somewhere back in the green New England hills, where he had been raised in a Puritanic atmosphere, the principles of which became with him no less of a deep-seated religion than they had with his straight-laced ancestors.

He had heard some wag say that gold was so plentiful in the West it was necessary to build high board fences around the islands in San Francisco Bay to prevent the nuggets from rolling into the water and obstructing navigation.

Lem never could see a joke. It grew upon him and eventually led him West where he landed short on dollars, but long on gullibility, unsophistication and Puritanic principles.

One trip across the bay on a ferry running close to Angel Island sufficed to throw his dream into the discard, bring him smack up against cold, cruel fact, and the dire necessity of rustling a job. He went to work in the Acme Laboratory where he drudged, studied and saved his money, and at the end of three years was a capable assayer, with a yearning to get away from the city and its fogs.

The full page ad in *The Desert Lyre*, which some one had brought in wrapped around an ore sample, intrigued him. An assay office in a bustling mining district was just what he wanted, and that night he wrote to Wm. Trotter, E. M., for more particulars.

"It pays to advertise, Mistah Trottah. It pays to advertise, sah, in *The Desert Lyre*," remarked the Colonel after reading the second letter in two weeks from Lemuel Godfrey to Wm. Trotter. He would have gone on indefinitely in the same vein of enthusiasm had not Bill stopped him.

"Never mind that old line of bunk, Colonel. Our sucker will be in on the stage in the morning, and we've got to get busy at something else beside singing the praises of that old scandal sheet of yours."

"But, Mistah Trottah," the Colonel blustered, "it is due the credit of getting this man here."

"Sure it is! But get on to yourself. Ain't we partners in this deal? All right, then, round up that flock of human scenery you control and give them their instructions. And as an incentive, tell them if the deal goes through I'll give them a big blowout at Lim Sing's pie foundry tomorrow night."

Bill put in the balance of the day at cleaning up obsolete laboratory equipment, while the Colonel perspired on Reagan's porch haranguing, and instilling into his followers salesmanship kinks peculiarly adapted to the disposal of assay offices in defunct mining camps.

When the stage arrived next morning all of Sunrise was lined up to welcome its one passenger, and before an hour passed, Lem began to think the cow that gave the milk of human kindness was stabled in that town. But Bill had no idea of leaving his prospect to the tender mercies of his fellow townsmen. No, not for one minute. They all had axes of their own to grind. Bill knew it and took no chances. As soon as lunch was over he led Lem away to the laboratory.

"You see, Mr. Godfrey," Bill explained, "I'm head over heels with work that I've got to finish before you take hold—if you decide to."

That afternoon business picked up amazingly in the Trotter establishment; its volume exceeding that of any boom day. "Sleepy" Wilson, "Baldy" Brooks, "Dutch" Fred and a dozen others who hadn't fingered a cent of their own in months were flush with cash to pay for assaying.

Trotter impressed them several times in a loud voice with the fact that he had always done a cash business and refused to break the rule on his last day in business. Lem was also duly impressed, as he sat at the balances weighing and recording results, while Bill labored over the furnace.

To Lem the great number of rich ore samples coming in from adjacent prospects was amazing, and he worked on through the afternoon blinded by an impervious veil of unsophistication.

Near evening the Colonel came puffing to the back door and beckoned Bill outside.

"Mistah Trottah," he began when they had walked a short distance from the door, "do you realize, sah, that I have sacrificed my priceless collection of rich ore specimens to insure the desired culmination of this transaction, sah?"

"Well, what of it?" Bill asked puzzled. "We're partners, ain't we? I'm putting this outfit into the deal."

"But I wish to impress upon you, sah, the extreme necessity of closing the deal tonight. This—er—phenomenal business can not be repeated tomorrow. The rich ore is exhausted, sah."

Bill was impatient to get back inside.

"Well, is that all, old timer?" he asked and turned as if to leave.

"No, sah, it is not. I find that the money I advanced to our—er—agents—to lend the desired atmosphere is not all being used for that purpose. Messers. Wilson, Brooks and others are becoming disgustingly intoxicated and dangerously talkative."

"Don't worry, Colonel. That sucker's hooked right now, and you're sure of your divvy; I know that's what's eating you. By sundown he'll have my name on the dotted line and I'll have his money. You chase back and keep that bunch in Reagan's. Get them so pickled they can't hit the floor with their hats, let alone talk."

The Colonel left muttering, and Bill returned to the assay office.

LONG shadows were falling across the ramshackle buildings when Bill closed the door, pulled the blinds and sat down to a table with pen and ink before him. A little later Lem folded the signed bill of sale and gave a long appraising look at his new property. Bill gave a sigh of relief, counted the roll of bills over and tucked them away in an inside pocket.

"Now young fellow," he said icily, "let me put you on to something in the assay game that you didn't learn in the Frisco joint."

Lem's eyes widened. The tone of voice seemed to unveil a different Wm. Trotter than he had known before.

"Glad to have any advice you can give," was the simple answer.

"When the birds in this town bring you samples to assay, give them big rich returns no matter if the ore doesn't carry a trace of value. You've got to kid them to hold their trade, and to keep them from getting mussy."

But I—I—I couldn't do that," Lem stammered. "That would be dishonest—unethical to say the least."

Bill gave vent to a dry, cackling laugh.

"It might be one or the other of them at that; I've been here too —— long to tell the difference. But take it from one who knows; it's —— good business in Sunrise."

Bill didn't hear Lem's further protestations. A knock came at the rear door and he hurried back to answer it. It was the Colonel, and in an anxious mood. Again they walked out of hearing from within.

"You can quit worrying now, Colonel, and make out the order for that mint julep farm back in Kentucky you been figuring on. I've got that sucker sold just as sure as death and taxes."

"Has he paid you yet, sah?"

"Nope, not yet. Was just getting out his roll when you interrupted us. You hurry back and herd your cattle into Lim Sing's for the banquet, and I'll be trailing in with the fatted calf in a little while."

Bill watched the Colonel until out of sight, then returned to Lem.

Lem started to renew his protest. Bill headed him off.

"That was the Colonel," he said. "They're giving a big feed up at Lim Sing's in your honor, and the old man was naturally anxious when you didn't show up. We been so busy today I forgot to tell you about it, and I told the Colonel so."

"Big feed?" queried Lem.

"Nothing else. Suppose you put on your coat and hurry up there now so's not to keep them waiting," suggested Bill. "It'll take me a little while to muck the high-grade off my hands and face and get into a soup and nuts uniform—oh, yes, a few of the best of us here wear them—and I'll be along in a little while."

Lem did as suggested, and walked slowly toward town wondering what it was all about. Never before had courtesy been showered upon him as in the manner of Sunrise.

For several reasons, the banquet was not a success. At the beginning Lem offered the Colonel an affront by flatly refusing to partake of punch which the old man had concocted with pains from hard-rustled ingredients. Fully an hour later the Colonel merged from the peeved to the perspiringly anxious condition when Trotter failed to appear. Then, as a fitting climax, over half of the guests did not get as far as nuts before they were heads down on the table snoring drunkenly. The Colonel stamped angrily out of the door and Lem followed, anxious to find Trotter.

Reagan's was empty as they passed. All the trace they could find in the assay office was some of Bill's old clothes on the floor. Outside, the Colonel found fresh horse tracks and wheel marks in the dust in front of the door. He back-tracked the vehicle to "Mormon" Joe's corral on the upper edge of town, and Lem followed not knowing what else to do.

Joe's boy informed them, after being hauled out of bed, that his father had started for the station, nearly twenty miles away, about an hour before with Trotter as a passenger.

"Told dad he just had a message his wife was dying in Frisco, an' he wanted to catch the limited," the boy told them.

"Poor man," said Lem in all sincerity.

"Poor —— lying scoundrel," said the Colonel, but to himself.

He now knew that Trotter had pulled out with the money and left him to hold the sack.

The Colonel faced a dilemma. He could not give that vent to the anger which nearly every fiber in him demanded. To do so would be to reveal his own hand in the affair, pull down ridicule upon him, and kill his prestige in Sunrise.

Above all things, his influence over his followers must be preserved; some day he might need their weight to back him up in some vital issue. All those matters were duly considered as he stood there in the moonlight with Lem close by wondering just what ailed the eccentric Colonel.

IN THE next few days no word came of Bill Trotter, and Sunrise dreamed on in its same old tenor with the Colonel's oratory its chief diversion. His dissertations merged from the old advertising theme to excerpts from a treatise he said he was preparing on the effect of incompetent assayers upon struggling mining communities. The mere sight of Lem on the street was sufficient to launch the Colonel on one of his tirades. Lem was an obnoxious reminder; he was like a red rag to a bull, and the Colonel resolved upon removing him from Sunrise.

The Colonel's undisguised attitude didn't worry Lem a great deal; he had other matters to ponder over. Business had fallen off to next to nothing. What few samples came in were charged on the book, and when the results were handed out, never failed to bring from the recipients such compliments as, "That's rich ore an' you can't get anything out of it." "Who told you, you could assay anyhow?" "Bill Trotter was the only man who could treat our ores," and many others in like vein.

Trotter's unethical advice often recurred, but Lem's Puritanic principles overruled all to the contrary.

"Gentle—men," the Colonel began weightily, "I regret to note that Sunrise has made no forward strides in the last month, and it is wholly due to the incompetence of Mistah Lemuel Godfrey the assayer. Self-preservation is the first law of nature gentle—men, and it pains me to suggest that we impress upon him the advisability of him leaving our community at once."

"Ride the —— faker out of town on a rail!" one man suggested, and similar cries of violence went up from the crowd.

"Suppose before we do that," proposed Jim Hyde, cautious and still unfired by the mob attitude, "we run a dummy sample in on him; something we're plumb sure ain't no good, then if that proves him a four-flusher give him the run, but let's be sure first."

It sounded good. Nearly all were in favor of the plan.

"But where gentle—men, in this district can we possibly find valueless rock?" queried the Colonel still hoping his original plan would carry.

Jim pulled a piece of rock from his pocket and handed it around for inspection.

"Why, it's a whetstone!" exclaimed Baldy Brooks.

"It ain't nothin' else," returned Jim. "When Mormon Joe moved away last week he left an old grindstone. I broke the darn thing sharpenin' my ax, an' put this piece in my pocket for a whet rock. What about tryin' Mister Assayer out with it? There ain't a trace of mineral in a million tons like it."

The suggestion was agreed upon. Sleepy Wilson reduced the rock to an unrecognizable powder in a mortar, wrapped the sample in paper and started for Lem Godfrey's.

"There, mister, see what you can melt out of that," said Sleepy with a sneer as he handed Lem the sample. "I want the straight goods this time or there'll be somethin' doing. None of them wild guesses like I been gettin' on my ore."

"I'd as soon you'd take your work elsewhere," said Lem. "I give you honest results and seem unable to satisfy."

"Mebbe you would as soon I'd take it elsewhere, but I ain't a goin' to. I'll be in here tomorrow an' you'd better have it done—an' done right's what I mean. The miners of this town has had about enough of your crooked work. Savvy?"

Sleepy's attitude snapped Lem out of his half-hearted, lethargical mood. He grabbed the sample up from the counter, dumped it into a pan and tagged it.

"It will be ready at two tomorrow Mr. Wilson," he said with a hitherto unused frigidity.

"I'll give you a tip," said Sleepy before leaving. "It's from a darn rich ledge an' I know pretty near what it'll run."

With that, Sleepy slammed the door.

That night Lem went to bed weighted with several problems. His money was about gone, he had no business worthy of the name and the people seemed all against him. He laid the Colonel's animosity to having refused to drink the punch at the banquet. Trotter's advice came to him. He tried to crowd it out of mind but it would pop back in.

"He may have been right," he admitted reluctantly to himself. "The square way's broke me. Now I'll give them—oh, heck!" and he turned over to lose trouble in sleep.

Next afternoon Sleepy came for his returns on the sample. Lem handed him the certificate in an envelope.

"I hope you'll be satisfied with that," said Lem with an ironical grin.

Sleepy did not satisfy his curiosity until on the way over to Reagan's.

He handed the paper to the Colonel and winked at the crowd. The Colonel read and gave a long drawn whistle of surprize.

"Gentle—men! My surmise has been well founded. This proves Mistah Godfrey to be a base deceiver; a faker of the dirtiest water." He waved the certificate. "This certifies that Mo'mon Joe's old grindstone runs one hundred and ten ounces and a fraction in silver to the ton. Quite extr'o'-dinary, gentle—men."

A laugh went up from the crowd; then came cries of "lynch him," later modified to "run him out!", and the citizens of Sunrise went to the assay office in a body headed by Colonel Blevins. They crowded through the door behind the Colonel and filled the space in front of the counter. Lem met them smiling.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Mistah Godfrey, we have reached the limits of patience and human endurance, sah."

The Colonel shook the certificate in Lem's face, and thundered out.

"Do you mean to insult our intelligence by telling us that old piece of a grindstone you claim to have analyzed runs over one hundred ounces in silver to the ton?"

In spite of the gravity of the occasion, Lem felt mildly amused. He resolved to stand pat.

"Old grindstone?" he asked.

"Yes, sah! Sandstone probably quarried back in the East, sah, and barren as a hound's tooth, sah."

"I gave you the true result of my work. What else would you have me do?"

"Get to —— out of this town, an' do it quick while you're able," came from one in the crowd.

They poured over the counter, and Lem backed away menacing them with a pair of tongs. They jerked the tongs away from him, and rough hands pulled him through the door. Jim Hyde filled a canteen from the water bucket and hung it over Lem's shoulder.

"Chances are you'll need this before you get across the desert," he said grimly to Lem.

Barely over a month before these same men had welcomed him and dined him. Now they escorted him to the edge of town and warned him never to enter Sunrise again. He smiled back at them.

"Did it occur to you, gentlemen, that you might some day regret this?" he asked and started out on to the desert.

That night Lem stumbled blindly on in the dark through sand and cactus.

AFTER several months passed and Lem Godfrey was forgotten, Colonel Blevins first truly felt his throne tottering. *The Desert Lyre* had failed in producing results, and was now openly scoffed at.

"The best thing about that paper's its name," remarked Sleepy Wilson. "That is if you just listen 'thout lookin' at the spellin'."

The offended Colonel would have taken issue then and there but for the arrival of a stranger on horseback from the South. He dismounted in front of Reagan's.

"What's the matter with this town?" he asked. "Are you all dead, asleep or crippled?"

"This town is far from being dead, sah," the Colonel bristled.

"Well, if you all ain't dead, asleep or something, how in —— come you let a bunch of Chinamen locate the biggest bonanza that's been struck since the Comstock? Yes, sir, an' right here in your yards almost!"

"Rich strike close to Sunrise?" "The whole country located by a gang of chinks?" were among the queries shot at the stranger.

He pointed to a low chain of mountains jutting like a long black finger into the desert, not over twenty miles to the South.

"Just came from there, and take it from me it's got old man Midas' pile lookin' like a dirty deuce in a clean deck, but the —— is a gang of chinks has got the whole —— geography plastered with location notices. Soon's the news gets out there'll be some run in there. I'm on my way out to rustle a saloon outfit to take in."

He entered Reagan's, threw a gold piece on to the bar and called the crowd to join him, but he had to drink alone for even then every man in Sunrise was feverishly busy preparing for a trip.

Four burros that had browsed for months on juicy tomato-can labels back of Lim Sing's were hooked to an old rickety spring-wagon loaded high with grub, bed rolls, picks and shovels, and the exodus was on.

The Colonel was taken along for his legal knowledge, impressive eloquence and shrewd sophistry. Too fat to make the long walk, he sat perched high on bed rolls, the only occupant of the wagon, wielding a long goad and vituperous tongue—the latter in masterly manner.

Lim Sing was given the choice of accompanying as an interpreter, with promises of a restaurant site in the new town if he went, or a violent death if he remained. He went.

"You'll be the only chink allowed in that town, Lim," they said. "This band of free-born American citizens intends runnin' them —— heathen countrymen of yours plumb out of the country and takin' that which rightly belongs to us through virtue of havin' watched over this desert when the rest of the whites deserted it."

Every time the burros stopped to rest, which was often, the Colonel stood up high on bed rolls and harangued the crowd along lines of violence, until every man there was fully determined to jump those claims; even though it took killing to accomplish the end.

Night came as they rounded the point and started up a long gulch. Blasting from above told them they were nearing their destination. Farther up the gulch they stopped. Sleepy Wilson indicated the ridge above them and several lights which seemed to be shining through tent fabric. A long walk had dampened the ardor they had started out with.

"You and the chink go up and reconnoiter, Colonel," Sleepy proposed, "the rest of us is dead tired after the long hike. We'll rest till you come back. If you need help though, just yell and we'll be there in a bunch."

With reluctance the Colonel made his way through the dark up a rough hillside, forcing Lim Sing ahead of him. He stopped in front of the first tent and halooed loudly. He nudged Lim Sing in the ribs.

"Call to them in Chinese, Lim," he said in shaky voice. "It may prevent them from firing on us from ambush."

Lim yelled something that sounded like, "high low," and followed with other unintelligible jargon.

The flap of the nearest tent opened and, instead of a Chinaman, a bearded white man stood in the entrance. For a moment, the Colonel was taken aback. It made useless the speech he had been rehearsing in mind for Lim's interpretation.

"Good evening, sah," he said instead.

"Good evening, Colonel," was the cheery rejoinder.

The Colonel rubbed his eyes, brushed memory and tried in every way to connect a vague familiarity with some definite person. All efforts were in vain.

"You have the best of me, sah."

The man laughed.

"Three months beard is somewhat of a disguise," he said stroking it. "I left Sunrise rather hurriedly and neglected bringing my razor."

Colonel Blevins felt a sinking sensation. His knees shook, and he turned to see if his comrades were within easy call. Lim Sing took advantage of the Colonel's moment of discomfiture to slip away.

"Mistah Lemuel Godfrey," gasped the Colonel.

"No one else," Lem replied smiling. "After leaving Sunrise I wandered around lost on the desert. Two days later I was picked up unconscious by several Chinamen, who were chopping sage brush on contract for the Desert Queen Mill. They nursed me back to health, and I made one more hand in their chopping gang."

Lem paused to toss an empty box to the Colonel, who was swaying rather uncertainly.

"Sit down, Colonel. Take it easy," he said, then went on, "One day when complaining about my dull ax, a teamster told me that Mormon Joe had a grindstone quarry in the near-by hills, and naturally I investigated. I found a streak in the deposit that ran far higher than that which I assayed for you. You remember the sample don't you, Colonel?"

The Colonel nodded feebly, but said not a word.

"I brought my Chinese friends over here to work for me and share liberally in my find. As they are not eligible to locate, it was all done in my name. I located thirty claims adjacent to the discovery and now hold that which I am sure is every foot of the mineralized area. There is nothing left for outsiders."

The last statement rubbed the Colonel the wrong way. It raised a slight semblance of his old bravado, and he remembered how he and his crowd had handled this unsophisticated youth as they liked.

"And now I presume you think your hour of triumph has arrived!" said the Colonel, bolstered by the sight of his friends moving around a hastily built brush fire in the gulch below.

"I do!" Lem replied with a smile and not a trace of malice.

"And do you think, sah, that my little band of pioneers—" the Colonel laid particular emphasis on the word my—"who have starved, labored, and suffered trying to bring this part of the desert to the notice of capital, sah, are going to sit idly by and see it usurped by a bunch of heathen Chinese, sah? You certainly have not forgotten our concerted determination in one mattah we at least thought we were right in, sah?"

A ROLLING stone attracted the Colonel's attention. He looked up to see six grinning Chinese in the rocks above. Each was armed with a pistol, rifle or shotgun. Lim Sing made a seventh, tightly clinging to an ax.

Lem waved them back to their tent.

"Everything's all right, boys," he told them. "I can handle this perfectly myself."

The Chinese slipped away, and the Colonel wondered how this man Godfrey thought he could handle twenty-one determined men. Lem smiled aggravatingly.

"No, Colonel, I have not forgotten. The mere thought of having wandered two days beneath a relentless sun, my lips parched and bleeding, my tongue protruding, swollen from my mouth and all the tortures of a hell on earth thrust upon me are sufficient to keep the instance you refer to forever in mind."

The Colonel winced, patting the ground nervously with one foot. Lem got it and smiled all the more. He seemed to like holding the Colonel in the torture chamber of his own conscience.

"And the more I've revolved the circumstances in mind lately, the more I've determined to pay every one for their part in them," Lem said with a scathing coolness.

The Colonel rose to his feet.

"You—er—seem to forget, sah, that I am the leader of a band of men nearly three times your strength, sah?"

Lem pushed the old man back to his seat on the box.

"I know your strength to a man. I've watched you with a pair of powerful glasses almost from the moment you left Sunrise, and hoping to meet you all on my own ground, I planned and brought about the trip you made today."

"The —— you did, sah!"

"I did. Al Gracey, the man who brought the news to you this morning, is a teamster hauling ore for me. I told him to spread the glad tidings in Sunrise on his way out after Bill Trotter."

"Mistah Trottah is in San Francisco, sah!"

The Colonel didn't know what else to say, and he just had to say something.

"Wrong again, Colonel! After bilking me, and incidentally your shrewd self, he landed in Sodaville and lost all in a poker game. I hear he is now there acting as dishwasher in a restaurant and, of course, it pains me to learn of his reduced circumstances. No doubt you'll be overjoyed to greet him tomorrow."

"And why all this effort on your part, sah?"

"To bring about a reunion of old friends and to pay them, at least in part, for their participation in my affairs. Of the thirty claims in my name six go to the Chinese who befriended me; five to Mormon Joe; thirteen to a company of Sunrise citizens, in which it will be specifically understood neither you nor Trotter participate; five to myself, and one to your good self and Mr. Trotter with a proviso that you work it yourselves, otherwise it reverts to me."

The night was cool but the Colonel perspired. He started to expostulate. Lem stopped him.

"Nothing will give me greater pleasure, Colonel, than to be instrumental in reestablishing that association and friendship which Mr. Trotter's fast-failing health interrupted; to be able to sit here and see both of you working harmoniously together. Now it's getting late, and you'd better run down and break the news to the others. Good night."

Without a word the Colonel got up and worked his way slowly down the hill. Halfway down he stopped to rest and think things over. It was a knotty problem. He decided upon the only plan he thought left open and continued on to the fire in the gulch, not knowing that Lem followed curiously a short distance behind.

"Gentle—men," he began in his old manner, "welcome to the new camp of Grindstone."

"Why Grindstone?" from the crowd.

He went on to tell them of its discovery.

"And gentle—men you have *The Desert Lyre* to thank for bringing Mistah Godfrey into the country and making this discovery. And you have its editor, gentle—men, to thank for standing up for your rights and demanding that Mistah Godfrey deed you a fair share of the new find. I had to sacrifice both mine and Mistah Trottah's interests in your behalf, gentle—men, but I did so unflinchingly with the same unselfish spirit that has characterized all my dealings with you."

Lem listened, smiling, from behind a near-by bush.

"The leopard can't change his spots," he muttered and made his way up to the tent.

Next morning Sleepy rubbed his eyes and gazed North over the desert.

"Well I guess Sunrise has set, but we're keepin' on with our nose to Grindstone."

Vengeance

A Complete Novelette

by

Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Author of "The Black Thief," "The Altar of the Legion," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE SWORD COMES

SIGMUND THE STRONG leaned far over the table, his blue eyes glowing with strange fires. The silver band that circled his mead-horn snapped in the clutch of his thick fingers; but, though the rough edge gashed his thumb deep, he felt it not. Nor did he stir till his brother Sigvard had nudged him thrice, with impatient force.

"You do scant grace to the feast," Sigvard reproached him. "Are you drunk so soon?"

Sigmund laid one arm about his brother's broad shoulders, and drew his head close to his own lips.

"'Tis an ill feast," he whispered, "that smells more of blood than of beer. This is an evil day for the house of Volsung."

Sigvard laughed, short and sharp, as a dog yelps.

"Now, though you are my elder brother," he jeered, "I hold you no better than a fool. This an ill day—this which united our land and our strength with the great power of the Gothic king? Our sister may think herself lucky to get such a husband as Siggeir.

"Any prince in the North would boast of such an honor as has been paid us, in that so mighty a folk should consent to make alliance with us. Do the Goths not number three swords to every two that follow our banner?"

Sigmund scowled into his mead, as if he found it bitter; then, raising his eyes, he glared about him at his father's boisterous guests. Of the two hundred hard-fighting, hard-drinking warriors that made merry with Volsung's mead, Sigmund alone sat silent and cheerless. Who would not have called him, as Sigvard did, an ill-natured fool? Yet he knew himself for no fool; and the more he gazed at the bearded revellers, the grimmer grew his mood.

"Men will see you and think scorn of you for an ungracious host," Sigvard urged. "Drink and be blithe! See how our father pledges his guests."

He pointed to the dais, where Volsung of the High House sat enthroned with the great king of the Goths on his right hand. Sigmund, following the pointing finger, smiled a bitter smile.

"See what cheer our sister makes!" he retorted. "Little joy has she in this marriage."

It was a fair sight for any man, the little group about the dais. Volsung, king of the Eastmen of Frakkland, was worthy of his fame as the greatest champion of the North and father of the finest sons and the fairest daughter within many days' sail.

In his fiftieth year he was yet as lean, his great arms were as smoothly muscled, as in his youth; his broad, firm features bespoke a matchless strength of will and pride of heart. To all his children he had given his might of body, his blond beauty and his fierce soul

Beside him the Goth Siggeir seemed dwarfed, though he was in truth no little man. In his early forties Siggeir was tall, and well-shaped, lithely erect, of a becoming dignity. An empire's ransom in gold and rough gems—looted by his sire from crumbling Rome—gleamed on his sinewy arms.

His brow was circled by a golden band, confining thick, black locks as yet but lightly touched with gray. His face, though somewhat too shrewd, was resolute; the scar that ran from one cheekbone into the tangles of his swarthy beard added to the manliness of his presence. His eyes inspired confidence—till one looked long into them.

King Siggeir smiled at his fair bride, as she stood before him, helping him to food and drink. No man could ask a lovelier wife. Taller than most women, she bore herself with the stately grace of a Valkyr. Her golden hair, gathered under a fillet about her broad white brows, fell in two thick braids below her waist.

Her mouth, the firm wide mouth of her father, was set in a tight line; her fine nostrils dilated as she met her husband's smile; her blue eyes, though steady, were not the eyes of a happy woman. She gave one glance to the bench where her brother Sigmund sat; he frowned again. They were as like, these two, as man and woman can be.

Volsung rose with slow majesty, his massy golden horn upraised. The noise of drunken revelry was hushed; the guests sank back on their benches, clasping their brawny, gold-decked arms. A servant brought fresh fuel for the fire-pits—though it was midsummer, an untimely frost made the night keen—and the warriors cast back their furred mantles, showing their woolen shirts.

"Let the horns be filled with ten-year mead!" cried Volsung; and the women waiting at the door thronged in, passing along the benches with their flagons, till every cup was full.

As became her, Signy herself, daughter of Volsung and new-made wife of Siggeir, served the two kings and the chief guests. These sat on a long bench that ran from the dais athwart the nearest fire-pit; on one side of it sat the princes of Frakkland, Volsung's ten strong sons; opposite them ten Goths, chiefs of high repute.

As Signy bent over her eldest brother's shoulder, Sigmund whispered, so low that only she could hear—

"Trust me, my sister!"

Signy was a brave woman; yet she trembled a little, and the mead gushed over Sigmund's hand and spilled upon the table. Sigvard noticed, and his eyes met his brother's.

WHEN all horns were brimming, Volsung spoke again:

"Men of Frakkland, chiefs of my people; and ye noble Goths, my guests! Drink a pledge with me! By the gift of my daughter's hand to Siggeir of Gothland, foremost of kings, I have bound together the fates of the two noblest of peoples. Drink with me to the weal and glory of our nations and to the wedded joy of King Siggeir and his queen, Signy of the House of Volsung!"

The warriors leaped to their feet, the most drunken sprawling over the benches in their haste. The firelight flashed on their golden armlets; the blackened rafters rang with their shouts—

"Siggeir! Siggeir, and the House of Volsung!"

Their mead-horns tipped till the curved ends pointed roofward, poised, and clashed empty to the deal tables. Still they stood, roaring their applause till Volsung seated himself and Siggeir rose.

He laughed as he came to his feet; with swift gestures, he stripped the golden spirals from his arms, leaving them bare, broke the precious coils in his strong hands, and hurled them broadcast into the hall.

Volsung's men sat quiet, waiting for their guests to have first chance at the largess; but the less disciplined Goths—chiefs and house-carls alike—sprang for the scattered strips of gold. Their rush swept the bronze dishes from the table, knocked the loose planks spinning from the trestles, and drenched the floor with spilled mead that gushed, hissing, into the fire-pits.

They tumbled about the floor, struggling together to seize Siggeir's bounty; then, as the last glittering fragment was snatched up, they separated, laughing. The winners pouched their spoil; the losers ran back for more drink. There was nothing left for Volsung's men, who sat ill-pleased.

House-carls set up the tables again; long-kirtled maids mopped up the floor and bore fresh meat and drink to the sweating warriors. In high good humor the guests settled down to their provender again.

"Pigs!" muttered Sigvard.

"Hush—our brother speaks!" Sigmund admonished him. There was savage irony in his voice.

The Gothic king still stood, gazing about the wide hall, whose splendor had given Volsung his surname. Higher and greater than any other dwelling from the Saxon coast to the polar ice, it was hung with painted, high-bossed shields and gleaming weapons. Bands of gold adorned its pillars; the hides of slain bears and wolves hung from its smoky rafters.

And in the midst of it towered the mighty trunk where its master worshipped—the Branstock, a huge oak with the majesty of centuries upon it. The hall had been built around the tree, the trimmed branches projected through the roof, and a fringe of shoots sprouting from its flanks obscured the opening.

In summer these shoots were green with leaves, for the roots were kept watered. Well back from it, on each side, the fire-pits ran to within five paces of the bench-rows that extended along the narrower sides of the building and all along its rear, save where a door gave on the bower and kitchens.

From the stately Branstock, Siggeir's eyes roved to the bench where the sons of Volsung sat, and met Sigmund's hostile glare. Almost too swiftly to be seen, the Goth's eyes narrowed and widened again; yet Sigmund saw, and smiled his thin-lipped smile.

Siggeir lifted his horn. His rich, mellow voice was lower than Volsung's and pleasanter.

"Kind have the gods been to me," he spoke solemnly, "in giving me to wife a princess of the House of Volsung. The strength of both our peoples is doubled by this marriage. More house-carls follow me to battle, and my shieldwall is greater than Volsung's; but no men among my folk can match with your champions, nor are there anywhere such warriors as the ten princes, the glorious sons of Volsung, whose valor is so like their sire's that men call them the Ten Volsungs. Happy am I on this day! I drink to the eternal friendship of our peoples!"

He emptied his horn at a single draft, the feat of a mighty drinker. The feasters roared their applause, none louder than the sons of Volsung. Only Sigmund sat silent, nursing his anger.

"Why do you not show him respect?" Sigvard whispered.

"It was ill done," Sigmund muttered, "to give our sister to a man she does not love! Didst thou see how she spilled the ale when she poured for us?"

"The confusion of a new-wed maid!" Sigvard scoffed. "I set no store by your croakings. No man has a stronger arm than you; but the gods gave you small wit for soothsaying. Because Signy was born at one birth with you, you were ever foolishly anxious for her!"

"Our sister is not the woman to be frightened by a husband!" Sigmund growled. "There is something under all this which I like not. Signy is a wise woman, who sees deeper than most."

None heeded him. All men's faces were buried in their mead-horns, While they drank, Volsung, his vast frame comfortably relaxed in the high seat, spoke the happiness he felt in his new alliance:

"The gods have been good to me also," he said to his son-in-law. "Ever have I been devoted to them—chiefly to Odin, whom I have worshipped at yonder oak all the days of my reign. Never have I left its trunk thirsty; it has been bathed in the blood of sacrifice and hung with the shields of conquered princes. For this Odin has given me prosperity—never more richly than in this our compact of kinship, Siggeir!"

He had scarce spoken when he stiffened in his seat, staring in amazement. Siggeir followed his glance; and he, too, gaped, and rubbed his eyes, as one who sees a vision. Their followers felt the tension; heads turned over shoulders, till every man in the hall was gazing, spell-bound, at the great door. Sigmund, staring like the rest, turned once to catch his sister's eye and recoiled at the sight of her. She stood with one hand clutching her breast, her strong, fine features pale and rigid, lips parted, showing set, white teeth.

A man stood in the doorway—a man none had seen before. The two house-carls on guard, strapping veterans in full armor, sought neither to hold nor to challenge him; they cringed, with slack jaws and trembling hands outthrust as if to ward away some nameless terror. Filling the entrance from post to post, shutting out the night with his monstrous bulk, the stranger waited, speechless.

Volsung recovered first. Never had he shown fear of any man; nor would he now.

"Hail, and welcome, whosoever thou art!" he cried, his voice ringing through the awed silence clearer than a trumpet through the shock of battle. "Enter, and taste our cheer!"

The stranger crossed the threshold, stooping to pass that door through which a tall man might stride with a hand's breadth clearance between its frame and the crest of his helmet. As he turned edgewise to avoid striking the posts with his mighty shoulders, the light from the glowing fire-pits and the fat pine torches fell full on him; and in the utter silence all started at the indrawn hiss of Signy's gasping breath.

The man was enormous, of such a make as the giants of old wives' tales. A white beard tumbled over his vaulted chest and hid his face to the eyes. Across his deep-seamed brow fell a lock of white hair, half-hiding the dead socket of one eye. The eye that remained was full, piercing, flaming with a blue fire that seemed to burn where it rested.

None could see whether he wore mail or no, for a long blue mantle spread its folds from chin to ankles. He wore no sword-belt, nor carried any weapon in his mighty hand. Wordless he stood, his one eye sweeping the hall. One instant it rested on Siggeir, and the Goth hid his face.

Then, ignoring the two kings on the dais, the strange guest advanced in three mighty strides to the holy oak; the Branstock, sacred to Odin. He stared upon it long and earnestly, nodding his head thrice; then he flung back his cloak, and all saw that a gleaming sword, unscabbarded, was passed through his belt. Suddenly, with a motion the beholders could scarce follow, he thrust the blade deep into the Branstock's bole. He turned then, and, facing the warriors, spoke for the first time.

"Whoso can pluck this sword from its place," he said—and his voice, though low and hollow, filled the hall—"shall have it as a gift from me; and he shall find that he never lifted a better."

He strode toward the door; but on the very threshold he faced about, his glowing eye fixed on Sigmund.

"He who wins the sword shall have need of it!" he spoke, and was gone.

IT WAS long before the spell-bound warriors could lift their eyes from the door through which he had vanished. When they did, it was but to stare at the sword, that still quivered in the oak. Half its length was buried in the tough wood; the gems that crusted its guards gleamed like angry eyes.

"A strange man, and a strong!" cried Volsung; and Siggeir, his lips white, made answer:

"Stranger, and stronger, than any man should be! My heart misgives me that this is some trouble-breeder, sent by enemies to daunt us!"

Then Signy spoke, though a woman, and in the presence of men; nor did any chide her, for she was reputed wiser than other folk.

"No man was that, but a god. It was Odin's self, and he comes for no good!"

The warriors shuddered over their drink. Only Sigmund, undaunted, gazed with longing eyes at the sword. Thus did each respond to what befell in accordance with the heart the gods had given him.

Volsung's face shone, uplifted by his daughter's words.

"If my house has indeed been visited by the Father of Gods," he cried, "then is this night a night of blessing, and the sword will prove a treasure to him who wins it. Thou, Siggeir, shalt try first, both as my guest and as the husband of my daughter. Such a hero as thou must surely succeed!"

Siggeir sat motionless, save for the trembling of his hands. His heart was cold with superstitious fear. He had not meant his words concerning the stranger; indeed he believed Signy right, and that it was Odin himself who had appeared to them. But Siggeir always said the reverse of what he thought, the better to fool men; and in this he usually succeeded. Yet though his hands trembled, his eyes glittered with greed. The firelight played on the imprisoned blade, dyeing its blue sheen with ominous red. Siggeir could scarce keep his gaze off the jewels and the hilt chased with gold. The more he looked, the more he coveted the splendid weapon.

"I will have it!" he cried; and leaping from the daïs, he ran to the Branstock.

His right hand grasped the hilt; he set one foot against the bole. The muscles of arm and shoulder knotted under his close tunic;

with all the power of back and body and legs he strained, till the sweat poured into his eyes. Then he set his left hand below the hilt and tried again. But, though he toiled till his sinews cracked, the sword did not stir from its bed in the tough wood. Defeated, his cheeks red with shame, Siggeir walked back to the dais.

Volsung signaled to the chief of Siggeir's bodyguard; and the men of Frakkland, too well trained to speak their anger aloud, glowered at the Goths. Sigvard spoke for them all when he said, under his breath, to Sigmund:

"They must always have first chance! Would my father but show less courtesy and more justice!"

"This is but the beginning!" Sigmund answered bitterly.

The Gothic captain swaggered up, a huge, heavy-set man, with limbs like the very boughs of the Branstock. A little gasp went up from every throat as he laid hold of the hilt. But though he strove with savage strength, his luck was as ill as his lord's.

One by one the Gothic chieftains took their turn; and one by one they slunk back to the benches, sullen, glaring about to see if any laughed. Such was their mood that trouble might easily spring up, should Volsung's Eastmen mock them. But their lord's keen eye, and the fear of his hand, kept these in check.

When all the guests had failed, Volsung signed to Sigmund, his heir. But Sigmund, his eyes gleaming strangely, shook his head. Sigvard, next of age, rose and set his strong young hands on the hilt. But though the least of the sons of Volsung was mightier than the mightiest among the Goths, neither Sigvard nor any other of the princes could so much as stir the blade. Siggeir's eyes glittered with a joy he could not hide. If he could not have the sword, at least no other should.

But the joy fled from his face when Volsung flung aside his cloak and advanced to try his own vast strength. In a land of champions, the king of Frakkland still bore the name of the most matchless among heroes. A confident smile lit his broad, fierce face as he closed his fingers about the chased hilt, and set himself for the pull. The smile vanished when his first powerful heave failed. Again he tried, and again; and at the third trial the blade stirred.

"Ha!" he cried, and set himself for one last, triumphant wrench.

With all his might he threw himself back, his right foot thrusting against the tree, both hands locked tight, and his arms swelling till the muscles seemed to rebel against the skin that prisoned them. In vain; exhausted, he drew back in disgust, and signed once more to Sigmund.

The latter wavered; but Signy met his glance with a compelling message in her troubled eyes. He looked about the hall. All eyes were on him; his countrymen's with eager appeal, the Goths' with ill-disguised hostility. He walked slowly, seeming indifferent, to the oak. But Signy read the hope and pride and bitterness in his heart.

He struck his open palm against the hilt, as if in scorn, and closed the fingers. He scorned to tug and wrestle as the others had done; he would not use both hands, nor brace his feet against the trunk. One pull he gave; and the sword, quitting its oaken sheath with a rending noise, came free in his grasp.

The warriors stared, dumfounded; then a great, glad cry burst from the throats of the Eastmen. The Goths sat silent, with hands that itched for their weapons.

Volsung looked upon his eldest son with a flush of pride. In the eyes of Signy there was a light both glad and stormy. As for Siggeir, it was a full minute before he could master his emotion; and for that minute his soul stood unmasked. But he had not dissembled all his life for nothing.

Astounded at his own success, Sigmund gazed at the sword in his fingers; then, with a burst of exultation that he could neither understand nor control, he swung the blade in flashing circles about his head.

Siggeir slunk down from the dais like a wolf creeping on a dangerous prey. Blanching a little before the brandished sword, he laid a hand on Sigmund's shoulder.

"I am thy brother now," he spoke softly, with the best smile he could command. "Wilt thou sell me the sword—for thrice its weight in gold?"

All Sigmund's distrust and hate of the man rose in his gorge.

"Thou didst try," he answered bluntly. "Had it been thy lot to have the sword, thou wouldst have taken it from the oak. But since it was my hand that drew it out, thou shalt never have it—not though thou wouldst offer me all the gold thou hast!"

Siggeir nodded, and smiled easily; but his teeth were clenched.

When the great folk had gone to bed, the house-carls talked it over among themselves; Volsung's men stretched out on their fur-covered benches in the hall and Siggeir's in the guest-rooms. The Goths blamed Sigmund for what they deemed a shameful insult to his guest and kinsman by marriage and bragged of the way in which they would avenge it, if they were in Siggeir's place; the Eastmen were as certain that Siggeir had done foully in seeking to buy with gold what a better man had won with his hands. But Goth and Eastman alike foresaw trouble over the sword, no matter what sacred oaths the kinsmen might swear to each other.

CHAPTER II

THE SWORD GOES

THE morning after the wedding-feast all men slept late, their heads being heavy with drink. The sun was high when Volsung rose from his bed in the loft; and as he came down the stair into the court Siggeir and his wife were just leaving the bower.

"A fair morning to you, my son!" cried Volsung.

"And to you, my father!" the Goth returned heartily. "I pray you, give command that my ship be made ready, for the weather is fair for our voyage home."

Volsung stared at him.

"Is this kindness?" he asked reproachfully. "What have I done to offend you, that you would leave me so soon? I had reckoned on a month's visit at least."

Siggeir shook his head.

"Naught have you done amiss; I am well content with your hospitality. But you know the sea between this coast and Gothland. If we sail not while it is fair, a sudden storm may overwhelm us. My bride is not used to foul weather."

Volsung glanced at his daughter. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes stony. He would have spoken to her; but, catching sight of Sigmund descending from the loft, she went to meet him.

"If you could but stay a week—" Volsung began; but Siggeir, smiling, refused.

"Thou shalt visit us instead, at the end of three months," he said, "and I will make amends for my lack of ceremony now."

As he spoke, he glanced at his wife, who stood some ten paces distant, talking with her brother. The distance was too great for him to hear their words. Had he done so, he would have been ill pleased. He turned back to the bower, leaving Volsung to join his children.

The old king marked his son's angry face.

"Ill-omened are your looks, my son," he reproved him, "for the last hour you may see your sister."

Sigmund started and laid a hand on his father's arm; but it was Signy who spoke.

"An ill-omened husband have you given me, my father!" she cried. "I pray you take me from him, and send him home with shame! Well I know that he plots mischief against you."

Volsung frowned.

"You have said what no woman should say of her husband. What mean you?"

Signy glanced over her shoulder; but the bower door was shut and Siggeir not to be seen.

"I could not sleep last night," she answered, "though I feigned to slumber sound. He tossed and twisted; ever and anon I heard him whisper, 'Give me vengeance, give me vengeance, ye gods, for this insult!' "

Volsung looked hard at her and turned to Sigmund.

"This is because you denied him the sword. His spirit will not endure being bested by one so young. But he will forget, when he is once busy with the cares of his kingdom."

"Nay, he will not forget!" Signy cried. "He is a snake, that watches its time to strike. Take me away from him, my father!"

Volsung considered deeply and at last laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"If I do as you ask," he made answer "Siggeir will have a real grievance against us, and all men will say that I acted dishonorably toward him. Nay, he is your husband; when he sails today, you must go with him."

Sigmund scowled.

"It is against all custom for a man to leave his bride's folks so soon after the wedding-feast. Signy is right—there is evil in this!"

"Go to; ye are but children!" Volsung chided them; but his heart misgave him, lest they prove right.

SO SIGGEIR sailed, with his wife and following, from Volsung's port of Ravenswick. Great was the crowd that flocked to see them off. The Gothic long-ship lay under a long headland, beneath which the river had scooped a channel that gave deep anchorage close to the bank. The shores were thronged with folk: Gaping farmers, with their women in gowns of scarlet, green and yellow; gold-adorned ladies, and house-carls in gleaming mail. Volsung and his sons stood on the pier, with the pick of their troops about them.

Siggeir's oarsmen thrust out their long blades to shove off; the helmsman thrust his weight against the steering-oar. As the ship swayed to the dip of the blades, Siggeir, standing on the poop, waved a hand.

"Remember!" he called gaily, "ye must visit us in three months' time! Bring your ten tall sons, Father Volsung, and such following of spears as may do you honor!"

"We will come!" Volsung promised.

But his smile died, for behind Siggeir stood Signy, her face dark with foreboding. As his eyes met hers, Signy shook her head, as if to urge her father not to make the promised visit. He made her a gesture of farewell and turned away. Amid the shouts of the sailors and the cheers of the crowd, the ship moved past the headland, caught the breeze and stood out with bellying sail. The oars were laid in; the water creamed beneath her forefoot.

The last Volsung saw was the still figure of his daughter, looking back to her old home and her kin. Heavily he returned to the hall.

But Sigmund sat on the headland till the light dimmed and the summer day merged into the green pallor of the Northern night. His face was stern, and his fingers caressed the edges of his strange-won sword. From the swelling coast-hills, bulking dark in the half-light, a smell of trampled juniper wafted to him across the estuary. The sun, which would not drop below the horizon till nigh midnight, painted a few low clouds an angry red. They seemed to pulse, like the mouth of a throbbing wound.

Sigmund looked from them to his sword.

"Ay, there will be blood over this!" he muttered. "Now, if it was indeed Odin who gave me this sword, and not some malicious troll, or such a man as never before was seen, then may Odin grant it may yet split Siggeir's heart!"

IN THE last gray before the September dusk, three white specks took shape upon the sea; and the wind falling, there came to the ears of the listening coastguard the beat of many oars.

The three soldiers glanced at each other.

"We had best make sure first," said one. "It will go hard with us if we bear Siggeir a false tale."

"And yet harder if we warn him not in time," another urged. "It can be none other than Volsung and his folk; for it is now three months since we left Frakkland, and he gave his word to come. What think you, Radgeir?"

The third, a sinewy officer with a crafty face, spoke thoughtfully:

"Volsung was never known to break word or appointment. Nor would he come with but three ships, unless he came in friendship. It is surely he. Let us speed with the news, that the king may have time to gather his spears."

The three melted into the deepening dusk, riding south, sparing not whip nor spur.

The ships came on, their sails now furled, oars chocking against the thwarts. As the dark drew in, their looming sides grew dim, but as they dimmed they swelled in bulk. The stroke lessened; plummets splashed, and the cries of the leadsmen rang upon the night. The water being deep off the shelving rocks, the three great craft were cautiously stroked in. Sailors leaped from the gunwales to the stony shore; ropes were tossed, and the galleys made fast to outcropping knobs of granite.

By twos and threes the crews sprang ashore—three hundred men, full-armed, their mail mantled in short cloaks. When a scant dozen remained aboard each dragon-ship, the lashings were cast off and the boats stroked out into safer water.

The warriors gathered together, waiting for orders. Volsung and his ten sons drew apart, consulting in low tones.

"It is passing strange," said the king, "that there is neither coastguard to challenge nor escort to receive us. They knew we would come."

"Perchance Siggeir has called in all his men, to prepare a mighty feast for us," Sigvard suggested.

"More like," growled Sigmund, "that he has called them in for a worse purpose. It were better to go aboard once more, and wait till day at least."

Sigvard laughed scornfully.

"Had any other said that, I should call it a coward's counsel!" he jeered.

"Nay, lads," Volsung chided them, "no need for harsh words! Nor have we anything to fear. Small gain would Siggeir get from treachery, nor have we cause to expect aught but friendship from him. March!"

At his command the house-carls fell into column and struck inland with the long strides of men who, though they use the sea, dislike the confinement of ships. Scabbards clanked at their sides; their shields rang hollow on their mail.

"We have not made the best landing," Volsung observed. "Here is no road, but the bare rock. Let us get this march over as soon as we may."

The pace quickened, and though here and there a man stumbled over the rocky ground, they made good progress. At last they came to stubble fields, where reaped grain lay gathered in shocks. As they moved on, a white figure edged like a ghost from behind one of the larger shocks and came out into the open in the very line of advance.

Volsung halted, and the front-rank men started back in fear.

"A wraith!" one cried; and "A troll!" echoed another.

But Volsung, who feared neither man nor ghost, strode to meet the apparition, loosing his sword as he went. Sigmund kept pace with him; but Sigmund laid no hand on his weapon.

When they were close to the dim figure, it ran to meet them, arms outflung.

"Signy!" cried Sigmund; and his sister fell into his embrace, sobbing.

Sigmund stroked her hair with rough tenderness.

"Tears are not thy wont, my sister!" he said. "What ill news dost thou bear us?"

The girl freed herself from him and seized her father's hand.

"Go back!" she cried, her voice low but vibrant with fear. "Embark, and sail hence with all speed! Siggeir gathers his hosts against you!"

"What mean you?" Volsung questioned. "How can my son-in-law plot harm against me?"

Signy controlled her excitement, forcing herself to explain:

"Two hours ago a detail of the coastguard came breathless to my husband's hall, with word that your ships were seen. Straightway Siggeir sent for his captains, ordering them to call up their men and fall upon you on the plain north of the court. 'Slay all,' was his command, 'save the ten sons of Volsung. Them shall ye bring to me, with all their weapons!"

"You heard this, yet he let you escape to warn us?"

"I heard nothing," Signy answered. "I was in the bower with my women. One of my maids is sister to Siggeir's standard-bearer; he told her, and she—who loves me—bore the news at once to me. I ran from the bower, through the court, to the stables. There I well-nigh ran into a company of spears; but hidden by the dark, I won a way to the steading of a farmer, who sold me a horse for a gold bracelet. He waits me yonder. Now flee ere it be too late, for my husband has sworn to take your lives!"

"By the blood of Odin!" Sigmund swore. "This is treachery of the blackest! Let us return, my father, to our own land, gather every sword in Frakkland and fall upon this dog with fire and steel!"

"That is my counsel too," Signy urged. "And take me with you! I can not bear to live with this murderer, this betrayer of kinsfolk, this wolf of the wood!"

Volsung pondered, while Sigmund twisted his hands with impatience, and Signy plucked at her gown. The younger sons of Volsung growled under their breath, feeling their weapons the while.

When Volsung spoke at last, his tones were those of a man whose purpose is set and can not be changed.

"I am old," he said, "and have never learned to flee. An hundred battles have I fought, most of them against hard odds; and always has the victory been mine. Now that my life draws to its end, I would fain have it close as gloriously as it began; nor would I have the women say that my sons showed their backs to a foe. Having come hither, we shall go hence with honor, or not at all. And you, my daughter, shall go home to your husband, and be henceforth a good wife to him!"

Signy met his eyes and read in them the fate of her house. Her breath caught in a sob. Quickly she seized her brother Sigmund's hands, pressed them to her lips and ran stumbling into the darkness. Then came the sound of her horse's hoofs, close at first, then dying slowly away.

"Forward!" cried Volsung. "Shields up! Swords out!"

The ranks closed; the sound of many blades slithering from their scabbards sent an ominous whisper through the night.

SIGGEIR'S scouts, too confident, announced Volsung's approach with loud shouts. Swiftly the old hero brought his men to a halt, ordered them into wedge-formation and strode along the ranks to make sure that shield lapped shield in an unbroken phalanx. He had still time to take his place at the point of the wedge, his ten strong sons about him, ere the first shafts flew from the dark.

But the time thus given them was for no kindly purpose, nor from any heedlessness of their foes. Even as they formed, the clink of metal all about them revealed that Gothic lines were encircling them; and the first arrow-flight burst upon the Frakkland wedge from all directions. Despite the dark, the archers could not miss so great a target; men dropped here and there, the ranks closing to fill their places.

Volsung's reply was what it had ever been—to meet numbers with strength and cunning with valor.

"Break through!" he roared; and his compact ranks sprang to the charge.

Gaining momentum as they rushed, they smashed through the Gothic circle as lightning tears through rotten wood. Swords flailing in front, long spears thrusting from the inner ranks, they took such toll that the extended Gothic line dared not stand before them. Once through—

"Turn!" cried Volsung. "Back, and rend them!"

The apex of the wedge became its rearward angle, each man pivoting where he stood. Then, swinging half-about to bring one of the base-angles to the fore, they charged again. This time it was not Volsung and his ten fierce sons, but the erstwhile rearguard that formed the new point of his assault. Stout men were these, yet not so stout as the eleven royal champions; and the work went more slowly. Nonetheless, with savage fury they tore at Siggeir's line, which had closed in solid before them. It stood between them and their ships, and they meant to win through at any cost. Their long spears ripped through shield and mail, till the press grew too great; then, pikes cast down, they forced the fighting at close grips, with sword and ax. Back bent Siggeir's first line, now thin and faint of heart; Volsung's trumpet rang from the rear, and with renewed fury his house-carls surged forward. The Goths broke—the red wedge stumbled through.

"To the shore!" cried Volsung; and on the house-carls pressed, teeth bared and blades dripping.

But a second line now barred their way, flanking them with a never-ending stream of swordsmen and lapping once more about their rear.

"They are weakest there!" Sigmund shouted to his father, pointing over his shoulder. "Let us turn again, cut through their rear, make for Siggeir's walls and take him as hostage against pursuit!"

"Thou art right!" Volsung answered, and gave the command.

Twice he had broken through; but he had lost one man in ten. This time the pivoting of the wedge again brought the king and his sons in the forefront. Their terrible blades bore all before them. Irresistible, they flung the Goths back, tore their ranks asunder, opened a gap through which the whole wedge thundered. But even as they won clear, a countless mass of men rose up from the ground before them—Siggeir's reserves, hidden by the blacker darkness in a little fold of the ground.

The two forces clashed with an impetus that sent both reeling, but the more disciplined Frakkland men recovered first. Once more they drove the thin point of the wedge through their foes and widened it with the dense ranks behind. A sudden shock in their rear drove the wedge free again, but that shock—the massed attack of the Gothic main host—crumbled one angle of the wedge and forced them to reform. As they did so, the foe they had just broken closed their way again. Ere Volsung could utter a command, their flanks were crushed together by a well-timed counter-attack from both sides.

Four times more the dwindling Eastmen rallied, struggled back to formation and, with their bloody wedge melting moment by moment, hacked their way through the midst of their foes. But the circle of steel closed about them each time; and Volsung's men, wearied to exhaustion, close-pressed by new and fresh masses, were driven to bay as a stag is ringed by the wolf-pack. The mounting moon showed them hemmed in by at least two thousand men.

The point of the wedge had borne the brunt of battle, though each man in the little company had measured steel with many foes. Four of Volsung's sons could scarce lift their shields; all were red with their own and others' blood. By strange good fortune, and through their own surpassing strength and the fineness of their mail, the princes still lived. Yet only Volsung himself, and Sigmund, seemed undaunted. Sigmund fought with a ferocity that even Volsung could not match; he could scarce be restrained from leaving his place in the wedge to leap headlong among the enemy. His wondrous sword bit through mail and bone, sending terror through all that faced him; and, exulting in its edge and his own hot young strength, he cut a red road for his kin to follow. But even his strong arm wearied with ceaseless striking, and his lungs fought for breath.

Desperately Volsung rallied his men, so bruised and weary that they could scarce stand. Now that the moon rode high, the Gothic arrows flew faster and found a surer target. The wedge melted where it stood, its ranks so torn that the shields no longer lapped at all.

"Too late to win!" Volsung shouted above the tumult. "Now die, and die so that Gothland may remember you!"

Heaving up his red sword, he sprang into the thick of his foes, Sigmund at his side. Wordless, reeling, the broken wedge staggered forward for its final charge.

A well-aimed arrow sped through Volsung's throat; he fell crashing before his men. Screaming with rage, Sigmund leaped to avenge him. The wondrous sword swung in his hand, like the hammer of Thor with the red god's might behind it. Blade could not parry it, shield could not turn it. Reckoning not whether one or a hundred of his father's house-carls followed, Sigmund ravened along the Gothic line till the hardiest recoiled before him. None dared face the madman and his invincible blade till, ringed about with Gothic dead, Sigmund stumbled over the heaped corpses of his slain, and sprawled on his face. The great sword flew from his hand, and the Goths hurled themselves upon him.

It was the end. Through his more than berserk might, and the matchless temper of his blade, he had wrought such terror in the Goths that they had pulled down all that was left of the wedge before they mastered him. Of all who had sailed from Frakkland with Volsung, not one remained alive, save only Volsung's sons. These, pulled down by sheer weight, were bound with new ropes and dumped, bleeding, on the farthest edge of the red field. It was here that Siggeir came to judge them.

The Gothic king had not exposed himself in battle. When all was done, he rode up on a fresh mount and smiled down upon the beaten princes. Of all Volsung's sons, only Sigmund saw him; the rest lay fainting with exhaustion and loss of blood.

Siggeir cocked one knee over his horse's neck and jeered. Sigmund, trussed like a fowl, glared up at him; and, seeing his own splendid sword in Siggeir's hand, his eyes glowed with hate. The Goth spat in his face.

"I thank the gods," Siggeir spoke in triumph, "that all my brothers-in-law live. There will still be enough feeling in them to make it sport to hang them."

Sigmund, helpless, spoke no word. Hanging was the most shameful of all deaths; but he would not disgrace his blood by begging for a better fate. He bit his lip, resolved to have no speech with such a dog as Siggeir.

He could not see the stricken field, with its heaps of slain, and the gallant pile of dead that had been his father's battered shield-wall; but he smiled grimly to think of the lives he and his had taken ere they fell. It was shame that all the sons of Volsung had been captured, when they might have died; but that was fate. They had given a good account of themselves, and exacted a fearful price from the foe. He knew not that Siggeir had commanded them to be taken alive, wanting them to grace his gallows. Perceiving that he did not know this, Siggeir told him, with bitter mockery; but Sigmund paid him no heed.

The torn Gothic ranks stirred, and a thousand faces lifted. The sound of hoofs, behind him, struck on Sigmund's ears. Then, ere he guessed what it meant, a hand caressed his bleeding forehead, and Signy's voice rang clear above him:

"A coward's deed hast thou done, my husband! Yet, because I am a woman, and thy wife, it may be that thou wilt grant me a gift. Thou owest it, having treacherously slain my father. I do not ask my brothers' lives, for I know thou fearest to spare them; I ask only that thou let them live a fortnight, that I may take them in my arms yet a little while, and so dull the bitter edge of my grief. This I ask for the sake of the child I shall bear thee."

For a moment Siggeir answered not; then he smiled cruelly.

"Thy prayer is granted!" he said, "the more readily since it will grieve them the more. Ho, fellows! Bind the wounds of these dogs, give them food and drink, and set them in the stocks!"

Signy shrank back in horror. Hanging was a foul death; but to sit alive in stocks was yet greater shame. Her eyes turned imploringly to her husband, but he laughed and turned away.

CHAPTER III

DEATH FROM THE FOREST

SIGMUND watched the moon climb over the edge of the wood beyond the Gothic court; as its yellow disk, full and pulsing, thrust above the beech-tops, he smiled grimly. The keen autumn frost bit his bound arms, and stiffened his wounds; the pain of them, and of his throbbing wrists and ankles, was a little dulled by the cold. His legs, after twenty hours in the stocks, felt like wood. Yet he smiled; for he was still alive, still strong, and so still dangerous to his enemy.

The moonlight beat down on the slumped bodies of his brothers, whose gashed and bloody legs protruded from the stocks in a long row. Three of them were barely conscious, though Siggeir had had their hurts washed and bound, that they might live to feel the shame of the halter. The others hung their heads, and their breath came hard and whistling as they strove to stir on the rough log where they sat together.

Sigvard looked up as the moon flashed in his face.

"You were right," he muttered. "Would that we had heeded your warning! Now we shall all die, and wretchedly!"

Sigmund laughed.

"Mayhap. But it is in my mind that our sister did not ask a fortnight's respite for us merely that we might make sport for her weasel of a husband."

"What mean you? We are helpless."

"I think," said Sigmund, "Signy will be here ere the night is done. You may be sure she means to set us free. Once quit of these bonds, we may yet hope for vengeance!"

Sigvard's eyes flashed.

"If I thought that— But nay; we are too weak to flee far, and all this land is Siggeir's. How may we escape him at all, let alone for long enough to devise some plan against him?"

"Where is your courage?" Sigmund retorted fiercely. "I ask but to be free, and I will make both the time and the means for vengeance. Henceforth I live but to wrest from Siggeir full payment for our father's murder and our shame. I know my sister well enough to trust her—she is Volsung's daughter, and will wage the blood-feud against his slayer till Siggeir's ghost goes red to meet the ghost of Volsung. I have watched this moon since its first rays pierced between yonder trunks. Certain am I that our sister will come before it sets!"

Sigvard bent his aching head in a gesture toward the farther end of the stocks.

"There be three that can not flee, though we be released," he objected. "Sigling is spent with loss of blood; Sigtrygg and Sintregi are cut to ribbons. They are overweak to survive the perils of flight, and mayhap hunger, while their wounds are yet unhealed."

"We will carry them!" Sigmund retorted. His lips set in a grim line; his eyes sparkled frostily. "By Odin I swear it, come what may come, the children of Volsung shall yet wreak their hate on Volsung's murderer. Take heart, then——"

Sigvard's startled cry broke off his speech. Following his brother's strained glance, Sigmund saw, on the edge of the forest, a dark shape flitting to and fro.

"That is not Signy," he muttered. "Would it but come out into the moonlight——"

He frowned anxiously, striving to discern what manner of thing it was which lurked among the beech-trunks. All his heart was set on the rescue he expected, and the vengeance to follow; yet this flitting shadow was not a human form, nor would Signy come from that direction. That she would come he was sure.

The shape was hidden now in the forest gloom. Long the brothers stared toward the spot where it had melted into the dark; then, suddenly, Sigvard screamed.

From the sheer blackness it had sprung—a long, low streak that leaped toward them with the swiftness of light. As it shot from the trees, the quick touch of moonlight turned it into a gray horror, with flashing teeth and slavering lips—a great, gaunt wolf.

Sigmund tugged at his bonds with all his mighty strength. The writhing muscles stood out on his straining shoulders and thighs; the wood of the stocks groaned with his savage efforts to break free. Beside him Sigvard also wrenched and struggled, but he was weaker far than his brother. As Sigmund threw himself back and forth in mad, unavailing efforts, Sigling, his youngest brother, shrieked once, terribly.

The youth, bound at that end of the log nearest the forest, had waked to consciousness with the wolf's hot breath on his face; the next instant his throat was torn out.

The wolf, with dripping jaws, stood on braced feet and looked once at the frantically struggling Sigmund; then, as if contemptuously sure of his helplessness, it bent to its ghastly feast. Sigmund, his strength spent, sat with heaving flanks and face dropping sweat, while the sound of crunching jaws and cracking bones filled his soul with horror.

Sigvard turned sick; but in Sigmund's face, bitter and gaunt, his eyes were living coals.

"For this also there shall be vengeance!" he whispered.

Morning came in a glory of red sun and tingling air; and with it came Siggeir, riding up between two house-carls. He ambled past the row of his foes, mocking them with gibes and sneering laughter. Then he set eyes on the bloody thing that had been Sigling, and he burst into shouts of evil joy.

All the brothers were conscious now; they scowled at him sullenly. Sigmund met his eyes fairly, and at sight of the hot fire in Sigmund's gaze the Goth shivered. But the firm bonds on his enemy's torn wrists gave him confidence.

"This is better than hanging them!" he roared. "We will let them bide here, till, one by one, they fall to the wolf! But lest they lose strength and die easily, they shall be well fed. Ho, Ulf! Speed back for meat and wine!"

The house-carl rode off, his lips twisting in a wry grin.

Siggeir dismounted in front of Sigmund. The Goth's face had lost its assumed frankness and was openly vile. His loose mouth writhed with mirth; his cunning eyes danced.

"A brave death!" he jeered, "and a fine burial, in the maw of a foul beast! Verily Signy will rejoice to hear of this! And the beast will return, lads, till all of you are done! Ha! Volsung had ten brave sons; now he has nine. Mayhap his ghost looked on, last night, and saw his youngest child torn into raw shreds. So shall it be with you all—all! Ho! And it was thou, Sigmund, that didst deny me a sword! I have that sword now—" he clapped his palm against his scabbard—"nor shalt thou live to win it back. Would it not have been better hadst thou given it me?"

Sigmund answered not; his eyes spoke for him. Siggeir renewed his taunts:

"Signy would have come to you last night, but I caught her and dragged her back. She had a knife to cut your bonds, balm for your wounds, and food—but ye will not need it now! Look not for her tonight, for she will be under guard; but, if ye look well, ye shall see—the wolf!"

He laughed again and leaped to the saddle.

Soon came Ulf with food. He placed the meat and drink on the upper beam of the stocks and, going behind the brothers, freed their wrists one at a time. Sigvard would have refused food; but Sigmund, disregarding the house-carl, admonished him—

"Take all they will give, that you may gain strength against the hour of our revenge!"

So they all ate and drank, one at a time, till all had fed and been bound again. Then Ulf freed the legs of each, for long enough to let the blood flow well. Each stretched his limbs and chafed one on the other, though their ankles throbbed and stung furiously. When they were made fast once more, Ulf stood off and surveyed them sourly.

"Strength to avenge?" he mocked. "Nay, strength to feel the sharp fangs of the wolf!"

The day passed, fresh and fair, with the flash of sunlight on the turning leaves; and night fell again.

That night the wolf came ere the moon rose; and Sintregi's soul went out between its jaws.

ON THE tenth night after the full moon, Sigmund sat alone in the stocks. The beams were bloodstained; blood was splashed on his legs and chest. His young face was seamed with lines of hate and anguish; his eyes burned with a fury nigh to madness. The flesh of his wrists and ankles was mangled with his struggles; yet each day, when food was brought, he ate with savage resolution.

The night before, Sigvard had been taken. His struggle had been terrible; for the meat he had eaten every day had brought back his strength; but strength availed him nothing. He was gone, and with him had gone the last of Sigmund's hope. With utter desperation he had fought to break his bonds and save his last surviving brother. He had failed; tonight it was his turn.

But though hope had fled, determination remained. Well he knew he must die that night; yet through clenched teeth he spat his hate of Siggeir.

"Though I die" he snarled, "though the wolf wet its teeth in the last of my blood, yet will I avenge!"

That day Siggeir had mocked him past endurance; and he had cried aloud his passion for vengeance, his centered resolution that, come what might, he would somehow slay his enemy before he died himself. Siggeir, with a harsh laugh, had pointed to the bones of Sigvard.

"Ten tall sons had Volsung!" he mocked. "Now he has one; and tonight they shall all be with him among the ghosts!"

Now it was dark. He was alone, and soon the wolf would come.

Somewhere a twig cracked, and Sigmund's heart gave an anguished leap. But the sound came not from the forest, where the wolf lurked; it came from the plain between him and the court. He turned his head and stared. Was the beast creeping up on him from an unwonted direction?

He heard the scrape of stealthy feet—human feet—on gravel; and a little pulse of hope began to hammer in his brain. A moment more, and a white figure crept toward him from the night.

"Signy!" he cried, and with running feet his sister came to him, her arms, white against the darkness, clasping his neck.

She kissed him twice; her tears wet his cheeks. Then she bent to his bound hands and strove to loose them. Her fingers were strong, for a woman's; but the knots would not yield. When she had plucked at them in vain a while, Sigmund bade her cease.

"I can feel," he said, "that the cord is too tight. Leave me, else the wolf will kill you. Be mindful of our vengeance, sister; in a little while thou wilt be left alone, of all the children of Volsung. It is thou who must avenge us all."

"Avenge you I will!" she answered, with such a fierce passion that even Sigmund, who knew his sister, marveled. "But I will not go till I have done that for which I came. I drugged my guards and escaped; but I could not drug all those who sleep in the hall or the servants in the kitchen. Therefore I could not get knife or sword for you. Even your bonds I can not loose; but I have brought that which may help you when the wolf comes."

She drew something from her kirtle, and, dipping her fingers in it, began to smear his face with sticky substance.

"What is that?" he asked; but as he spoke, a little of the stuff trickled into his mouth. It was honey.

"I have heard," she explained, "that wild beasts love honey more than flesh. Your hands are bound, but your teeth are free. Do you understand?"

Sigmund laughed savagely.

"I do! Would that you might turn Siggeir into a wolf!"

"If you live," she said, "you will hear from me again. I must go now, ere the guards wake and miss me. I would stay to bide the issue with you; but if you escape, it must not be known that I have helped you. I must be unsuspected, if I am to serve you later."

"You speak wisely. You and I were born at one birth; in soul, as in feature, we are alike. Remember—each moment of your life—that there is neither rest nor joy for us till our father and our brothers are avenged. Neither poison nor a knife in the back will serve our purpose; Siggeir must see the stroke that fells him, must taste his death in torture and shame!"

Signy laid her hands on his head.

"Goods, life, honor," she spoke solemnly, "all that I have or am, I will give for our vengeance!"

"Thou hast sworn. Now flee, ere the wolf comes!"

Signy disappeared; and Sigmund waited

for fate; nor was his waiting pleasant. So highly was his spirit strung that the honey smearing his face irked him more than fear of the wolf's fangs. It was with relief that, more than an hour after Signy's departure, he saw the flitting shadow that was the beast gather for its spring.

In very mid-crouch it checked, rose stiff-legged and snuffed the air. Sigmund waited tense and eager. Slowly, nose up and yellow eyes questing, the wolf trotted forward, stopping every few steps to sniff and glare suspiciously; yet ever it came on again, as if fascinated. At length it leaped upon the upper beam of the stocks and resting its hind feet there, planted its forepaws on the doomed man's shoulders. Its position was cramped, for it was huge—a great female with chest and shoulders bigger than any dog-wolf Sigmund had ever seen.

It bent its head toward him; and as its tongue touched his cheek, the evil breath of it stung his nostrils. Sigmund's muscles quivered. The beast began to lick the honey from his face, and he cursed the fate that had deprived him of the use of his hands.

The wolf's tongue touched his lips, where the honey was thickest; and at the touch Sigmund opened his lips a little. The hot, foul tongue of the monster rested one moment on his; then, seeking the source of the sweet stuff, she thrust her tongue deep within his mouth.

Instantly Sigmund closed his powerful jaws, his teeth clamping down on the warm tongue with all his strength. Snorting with pain, the wolf heaved back, her legs braced hard against the beam of the stocks. As she reared, Sigmund threw back his mighty shoulders, lifting up as well as he could with his imprisoned thighs. His grip on the beast's tongue tightened; the wolf, slavering and whining, struggled with savage fury. Heaving, even as she heaved, Sigmund heard the braces of the stocks groan, crack and burst. The last thrust of the wolf's legs, given even as he threw back once more, wrenched the upper beam aside and flung it down.

With a strangled grunt of joy, Sigmund slid to his feet; but his legs, cramped with confinement, crumpled under him. Yet his teeth kept their hold, though he rolled from the log and fell heavily. The wolf was jerked down over him, her tongue nearly torn from her mouth. Her claws tore at him; she strove in vain to free her jaws and bury her fangs in his throat.

Flat on the earth, Sigmund wrenched his head to and fro, the wolf hurling herself backward in frantic attempts to tear free. At last, her forepaws against his shoulders, she thrust mightly and broke loose. But she neither bit nor howled; with drooped head and tail between her legs, she slunk into the forest, dripping blood from her black lips and moaning. Sigmund, unclenching his teeth, cast her mangled tongue aside and struggled to his tingling legs.

With swollen feet he felt about for a sharp stone; and, stumbling over a jagged bit of flint, he lay down against it, rubbing his raw wrists on its edge. It slipped and moved, so that he could not find it again. Rising with an effort, he stumbled about in the dark till he struck against a great boulder; and against this he chafed his bonds till they fell apart.

Paying no heed to his hurts, he broke into a lumbering run that bore him deep into the forest. He had no knowledge of the country; again and again, in the night, he fell heavily over stones, or crashed into tree-trunks; yet ever he rose and ran on, till the night was far spent, and he with it. He lay where he fell the last time, and there morning found him.

CHAPTER IV

OUTCAST

WITH the first light of day he was up, his wrists and ankles throbbing with their untended hurts. All about him stretched a dense, virgin forest of oak and beech trees immeasurably old, of mighty girth, that shut out the sun with their leaves. The ground was thick with fallen leaves and mast.

At last he heard the sound of running water, and in a little while he splashed into the bed of a clear stream. He flung himself prone in it, drinking till he was sated and letting the cold water cleanse and freshen his body. Then, walking upstream, he bathed his wounds. This done, he pressed on again, searching the forest all about him with quick glances. Siggeir's men would be on his track soon, if they were not already; for Siggeir dared not let him live.

The forest seemed endless. On and on he hastened, till his feet would scarce bear him and his head grew hot with fever. Rest he must have, and that soon; but first he must find a safe place. The forest seemed utterly wild. He saw no human soul, nor the least trace that the foot of man had ever passed there. About the stream had been beast-tracks, but no spoor of horses, cattle or even swine.

He came to rising ground, thick-strewn with boulders. Up he pressed, thinking the rough ground would give him the means of dodging pursuit. The trackless slope was almost free from undergrowth, so dense was the foliage and so greedy the roots of the great trees. The hill grew ever steeper, till he was forced to climb on hands and knees and to lift himself over huge lumps of granite.

He brought up at last against a sheer ledge, down which, a little from him, water poured with a sound of thunder. He made for the fall, meaning to refresh himself with the spray of its edges; and when he came near, he saw, with a thrill of joy, that the ledge under it was hollowed out, so that a man might pass between waterfall and rock. Slipping between, he found, a little below the level of his shoulders, a cave.

With his last strength he hoisted himself up and into its mouth, to fall panting on its floor. It was long before he gained energy enough to rise and search it.

The cave floor was almost level, slanting at first a little up, then down. Its height was somewhat more than a man's and its breath a good ten feet. Without light, Sigmund dared not go deeper in; but he had no need to for the present. It was well hidden, and its floor was strewn with stones that would serve for rough weapons.

He threw himself down to rest, and to wait. The pursuit would not be long delayed. Siggeir would send men enough to scour the wood from end to end. Sigmund hoped they would come soon, for he knew what he had to do and wished it done.

One moment his nerves were tight stretched, listening for hoofbeats and the the clang of mail; the next, he was asleep. How long he lay there he knew not; but when he woke, still feverish, but refreshed, a jumble of sounds rang in his ears; the shouts of men, the clatter of weapons, all dimly confused and muffled by the fall of the waters.

Sigmund sprang up, his hands fumbling for a stone. Finding one both weighty and sharp, he slipped down from the cave-mouth and peered from behind the screen of falling water. A shout rang close at hand; a mailed warrior leaped into view pointing with his spear toward the ledge. The man had approached from the side and had seen both the space between fall and rock and the shadowy mouth of the cave.

Sigmund hurled his stone full into the house-carl's face. The Goth fell, his skull shattered. Swiftly Sigmund ran to him, stripped him of shield, spear and sword, and glanced about for the next foe.

A cry of rage warned him barely in time to spring aside from the swishing flight of a spear. Two men—two only—were in sight: one, an officer, yelled an order at the other, who raised his elm-bow and fitted shaft to string. It was pointblank arrow range, and too far for a spear to carry. Yet Sigmund hesitating not, hurled his spear even as the bowstring twanged. The shaft flew past his ear; in answer to its hum came the clangor of his weapon tearing through the archer's mail. In his extremity, Sigmund had made such a cast as men might tell of for generations to come.

He hurled himself upon the officer, who stood manfully to meet him, shouting for help the while. Their blades met with a grinding clash; but Sigmund's strength tore the weapon from the other's hand. A second stroke sheared the Goth's mail, rent the shoulder asunder and found his heart.

Sweeping the forest for signs of fresh foes, Sigmund found none; but he found what pleased him more. Through the long aisles of trees a fresh trail was torn—a trail made by many horses, leading away from him deep into the wood. The pursuit had passed; these who had sighted him were stragglers, whose horses had foundered, leaving them to follow afoot.

Swiftly he bore the bodies, first the two house-carls, then the officer, to his cave; and, piling the captured weapons beside them, he went back to cover the traces of the fight. He smoothed out the deep scores made by his and the officer's feet in their conflict, covered the blood with earth and leaves and went once more to his cave. Here, by its mouth, where a little light filtered in around the fall, he examined his spoil. He had three suits of mail, two shields, two undamaged helmets, three swords, a spear and a bow and quiver of arrows.

The archer had been a big man; his mail, though somewhat close in fit, would serve. So would the cloak and breeches, of good, stout stuff. In the officer's pouch he found flint and steel; and, venturing out, he brought in dry moss and wood for a fire and torches. He was without food; but when his pursuers should have passed again, he would hunt. He sighed at the thought of food—he was ravenous as a beast. The exertion of the fight had sent him into a deep sweat, with which his fever had vanished.

The days that followed, with the sweet woodland air, with rest and food—the forest abounded in game—brought back abundant strength to Sigmund's limbs. Once sure of his endurance, he struck out, with set, matured purpose, through the depths of the wood, to find the sea. Vengeance—the settled passion of his life—drove him on. It was in his heart to make the coast, whatever hazards lay between; to steal a boat, and so reach his own land. Once there, he would proclaim to his people the fate that had overcome his kinsmen, raise a host, and return to lay Gothland waste from end to end.

The plan was ripe, firm at all points. His ships would fall on Siggeir's coast by night, and pour out their crews in a fierce stream; they would creep through the dark to Siggeir's court, set the garth on fire, and drive back into the flames all who, fleeing from the red death, might run on their points. Signy alone he would spare; she should yet find happiness with a better husband. As for Siggeir—at thought of his name Sigmund's teeth ground and his brain went hot—Siggeir he would take alive and burn him, very slowly, that his coward's soul might fly shrieking to its doom.

On his broad back Sigmund bore as much food as he could carry. He wore the mail he had captured; but, to lighten his march, he took no weapon but a sword. With steady stride he marched all day and far into the night. He was up at dawn; noon brought him, on a biting wind, the salt tang of the sea.

Reaching a fishing village, he laughed aloud at sight of a score of tiny sails dancing on the choppy water. But as he strode toward the landing-place, a great ship of war swept out from behind the grim headland that bounded the tiny port. Red shields gleamed on her bulwarks; at her masthead fluttered Siggeir's pennon. So close she passed that, to avoid discovery, Sigmund was forced to dodge behind a salting-shed.

He almost fell over the knees of an old fisherman who sat on a barnacled post, mending his net. Sigmund clutched the gaping peasant by the arm.

"What do the king's ships out at this season?" he asked sharply. "It is overnigh winter for cruising."

The old man stared in bewilderment.

"You bear the king's mail," he faltered, "and do not know?"

"As thou seest," Sigmund retorted. "Speak, when I bid thee!"

"They have come back, good sir, from the conquest of Frakkland."

"Frakkland?" Sigmund echoed, his heart flooding with dismay. "Frakkland—conquered—by Siggeir?"

The old man dropped his net, and scrambled to his feet.

"Who art thou," he gasped, "not to know of this? To what man in all Gothland is it unknown that our king set forth, but twelve days since, to bring Frakkland under his rule? And now his dragon-ships return, victorious. Had he not destroyed Volsung and all his sons save one? Was it not meet that he seize the occasion to finish what he had begun?"

Sigmund's eyes burned on him so fiercely that the fisherman broke off, affrighted. The hate in the young man's face roused him to comprehension; he ducked under Sigmund's arm and ran to the shore, screaming in shrill terror:

"Help, help, ye Goths! Sigmund is here—the son of Volsung!"

Cursing his clumsiness, Sigmund left the fisherman still shrieking and waving his lean arms at the long-ship. She was almost past the tiny bay, but on her poop stood a knot of spearmen, pointing and shouting. Sigmund, without waiting for pursuit, sped inland to gain the shelter of the desolate forest.

Well for him that he did so; for so close was the king's ship to land that the old man's cries had been clearly heard aboard her. As quickly as the helmsman could bring her about, she was brought in and made fast to the rotting piles. Ere the fugitive had reached the nearest trees, a score of housecarls were after him; others waited only till their horses could be brought ashore.

The bleak depths of the forest opened to receive the hunted man; and with the strength of despair he laid the miles of woodland behind. At first he fled straight and far, to place as much sheer distance as he might between himself and Siggeir's spears. Then, when he deemed it safe, he turned aside, dodging and twisting on a weaving track, till the early night fell. He felt no shame in flight, for he had no fear. Death meant nothing to him, who had defied fire and steel from childhood, who had seen his father fall at his side, and his brothers torn to shreds by the wolf—ay, and himself had been so close to its hot jaws that the swift, short agony of ax or spear seemed but a grim jest. He feared nothing save that he might lose forever his precious chance of revenge. To avenge his dead he must live; to live he must keep out of Siggeir's hands. For this he was ready to flee when he must, though he longed for the joy of meeting his foes face to face.

In the first hours of his flight he heard, over and over again, the faint, far cries of his baffled enemies. Now, as they caught the print of his foot in the half-frozen mud of a stream-bed, they raised the viewhalloo; then, having changed his course, he left all sound of them behind. Dusk fell. He had lost his bearings in his tortuous flight, and knew not how to reach his cave. A hollow tree gave him a hiding-place.

THE tree, an enormous oak, was so rotted out with age that he could stretch his long legs at ease within it, his back against the wood. Long he waited, ears stretched for the least sound of pursuit; but only the scurrying of little animals, the prowling pads of greater beasts, or the scuffle and squeak of hunted wild things, disturbed him. At length he fell into a deep sleep.

Just before dawn he awoke, suddenly, hand on hilt. A glint of trembling red shone through the hollow oak; rough voices rumbled in his ears.

"They hunt a wolf, but will stoop to a weasel," some one spoke from beyond the crimson tongue of a camp-fire. "It is not worth Siggeir's trouble to hunt us, so long as we disturb him not; but if his carls stumble into us in their chase for Volsung's son, then will they slay us to appease the thirst of their spears."

"Why should we not hunt Volsung's son also?" The voice that asked was sharp and shrill, edged with evil. "If we can deliver him up to Siggeir, our crimes will be forgiven. Mayhap we shall get gold to boot."

A moment's silence; then the third spoke:

"Wise words, Hund! Then there will be an end of our hard life, and we can live at ease once more in the pleasant towns. Siggeir will be glad to give us both gold and pardon. His house-carls are fools, who can not find their way in the forest; but we, who know the wood as well as the very foxes, can easily track down a stranger like Sigmund."

Sigmund sat mouse-still; but the fingers about his hilt were clenched hard.

"Look ye, then," said the first voice, "we must lay our plans well, and be secret. There may be many other lawless folk hereabouts, who, like ourselves, have sought refuge in this wood. From them we can have help, but that would mean dividing the reward. We must keep this secret between us, and find Sigmund ourselves."

He who was called Hund laughed jeeringly.

"Wisdom was born with thee, Thorir, and will die with thee!" he mocked. "Has none told thee that Volsung's sons were all big men, wondrous strong, and Sigmund the mightiest of them all? It will be hard for any three men to master him. Therefore I hold it best to get the help of our fellow outlaws."

The others broke in on him with curses:

"Nay, misbegotten one! We will have all the gold for ourselves! If thou fearest, leave it to to us, who are brave!"

"Not so!" shrilled Hund. "I will strike as deep as any of ye! And I will have my share! But if we must do it alone, then must we find where he hides, and creep up on him while he sleeps, and bind him."

His counsel was shrewd, and the others praised him.

"Are we agreed, then?" asked the first. "When light comes, we will separate, and each hunt Sigmund by himself. Each night, till we find his lair, we shall meet here to give account of the search. When we know where he is, we shall stalk our quarry in his slumber, all three together."

Sigmund heard them with a grim smile. He moved, very softly, so that he could peer out through the hollow.

Between the great trunks of the oaks they sat, those three outlawed men; big of limb, all, and heavy-bearded. Their garments hung in grimy tatters over rusty mail; their swords were out at scabbard. The flickering firelight played over their vile features, betraying them for the rogues they were—peaceless men, who warred on the defenseless and struck in the dark. They were the first human souls Sigmund had seen in the forest; and their hands, like all men's, were against him. The baseness of their plot, and the thought that here, in his last, desperate refuge, such things as these hunted him, threatened his vengeance, filled him with fury. He stood alone on earth, the homes and ways of men closed to him, the very scum of mankind baying at his heels. His lip lifted in a snarl; in that moment he, who before had but defended himself, became a pitiless killer.

Inch by inch he edged, on hands and knees, from the hollow tree, his sword clenched in his fingers. He was halfway out when Hund, having thrown more wood on the fire, looked up; and in the rising flame saw a fierce face, bristling with stubble, glaring at him with hot eyes. With a cry of fear the outlaw scrambled to his feet.

His comrades leaped up, snatching at their weapons; but on the instant of their rising Sigmund was among them. One, turning at bay with darting point, was hurled to earth, his skull split at the first stroke; Thorir fell as he turned to flee; Hund, shrieking, heard the pad of ruthless feet behind him for a hundred yards ere death ended his terror.

Sigmund scowled into the gray light of dawn.

"So there are more of them in the forest?" he muttered. "Ay, so they said. Good! I will hunt them ere they hunt me. By all the gods of Asgard, I will make my name so terrible to them that they will fling themselves into flood or fire rather than face me!"

He kept his word.

But he heard nothing of Signy, though days and years dragged by.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST STROKE

"LITTLE need I fear thy brother now!" Signy turned her calm gaze on her husband, standing with widespread legs between her and the hall fire; but she said nothing. What should she say?

Not one word had she had from Sigmund; nor had such few timid messengers as she could trust brought back any news of him. The forest was great, trackless, swarming with wild beasts and reputed the abode of demons. Not many dared brave its perils. She knew not even whether Sigmund yet lived; this alone she knew: If he lived, he would neither give up his cherished vengeance nor fail to take the first means that offered to get word to her.

"He has been eaten by wolves," Siggeir taunted her, "or slain by outlaws. I was overprudent to take such precautions against him. His valor and strength were less than men thought; else he had lived and sought me out with the sword."

Signy went on with her sewing.

"How should one man, however brave," she asked, "get at a foe who never shows his face outside his walls unless a hundred house-carls attend him? If thou hast any wish to meet Sigmund, go alone into the forest. But, as thou sayest, he is doubtless dead. A kind husband thou hast been to me, to bring about the death of all my kin."

Though her words were bitter, her tone was unmoved. She bit off her thread and, laying her work aside, arose.

"Since thou no longer hast cause to fear my brother, wilt thou give me leave to build me a bower where my father's sons were slain by the wolf? It is now ten years since Sigmund escaped, and in all that time nothing has been heard of him. I would fain have a place to mourn my brethren; nor is there anywhere a fitter place than where they died."

Siggeir regarded her a moment, his eyes filmed with suspicion. She had been a docile wife and had borne him two strong sons; but she was of the Volsung blood, unlikely to forget an injury. Yet, if Sigmund still lived, he would surely have struck before this, even though he cherished scant hope of success; for the Volsungs were proud and reckless, prone to give their passions full course, though they died for it. All in all, Siggeir saw no reason why the building of that bower by the stocks at the forest edge could work him harm. He was more afraid of his wife's quiet, unrevealed resentment than of the flaming spirit of her brother, dead or no. A woman who endured all things so quietly, neither breaking nor retaliating, was as strong and deep as the sea. It would be as well to yield to her in small things; it might help her to forget how cruelly he had injured her.

"Thou shalt have thy bower," he answered, his lips framing a twisted smile. "Give orders how thou wilt have it built, and I will see it done."

She thanked him quietly and passed out into the kitchens.

Siggeir stood staring after her. A stately woman this, unbent by suffering; there was no thread of gray in her spun-gold hair, nor a wrinkle marring her face. How could she bear up thus under the load of grief he had put upon her? Well he knew she had not forgotten; well he knew she did not love him. But he never perceived the full, deep tide of her hate, that so filled her as to leave no room for other emotions. Her hate for Siggeir—unlike Sigmund's—was not one that burned the soul and seared the features, not one that set the weary body twisting and the nerves throbbing in the very depth of sleep.

She was content to live on, doing her daily task, waiting patiently for the time ordained of the gods. The revenge for which she lived was, to her mind, as sure of fulfilment as the coming of spring after winter—she looked forward to it as a maid bethrothed looks forward to marriage. It was the fixed and certain culmination of her desires. For this reason hatred, though coursing through her veins with her blood, did not age her; nor did grief—lulled by the constant thought of the revenge to come—mark her loveliness with the lines of sorrow. Woman though she was, she was the strongest soul of all the House of Volsung.

For once Siggeir kept his word to her. That same day he sent laborers with adze and saw and hammer, to build the bower where the stocks had been. Oxen hauled seasoned timber from his yards to the spot and the work went forward briskly. In three days the bower was finished. The pungent smell of balsam hung about the wood; rich webs of tapestry clothed the walls; vessels of gold and silver adorned table and chests. The floor was strewn with fresh rushes, and in the hearth glowed a hot fire.

The king himself brought his wife to see the abode he had built for her. With a strange feeling, half pity, half desire to taunt her, he had seen himself to the adornment of the walls and the service of precious metal. Everything there, from the simplest brooch to the richly molded flagons, was spoil his crews had ravished from conquered Frakkland—from the very hall of her father.

Seeing these, she understood; and for the first time since Sigmund's flight her hate touched the springs of passion. Yet, with cunning strength, she dissembled, after a single stolen glance at her husband's girdle, where hung the sword that Sigmund had wrenched from the Branstock. When Siggeir left her alone with her devoted maidservant, she began to weep, thinking of the happy days of girlhood, of her brothers, and all the many scenes which these precious things about her called to memory.

Her tears fell fast, at first silently, then with sobs that racked her breast. It was long ere, weary to exhaustion, she fell asleep. When she woke, the torches were out; and she knew it for the dead of night. The fire had died down to a heap of red coals; the windless night was bleakly chill. Shivering, Signy roused her maid.

"Is it midnight yet, Valrun?" she asked.

The maid nodded, then, remembering the dark, she answered aloud.

"Ay, for the king's guard has been changed. I heard their calls from the garth."

"Make up the fire, and light a torch."

The maid fetched fresh wood from the outhouse, and heaped it on the coals. When the flames filled the room with their gleam, Valrun saw that the queen had drawn the thick hangings across those windows which gave on the clearing and the royal court beyond.

"What need of a torch?" asked Valrun. "Is the firelight not enough?"

"Not for my need. Nay, do not close the hangings there; I would breathe the odors of the forest. What guards have been set here?"

"Few," the maid answered, "this being so near the garth. Ulfgeir and two housecarls watch on the forest edge."

Signy smiled strangely

"Go out, and bid Ulfgeir come to me," she ordered.

The maid put on her cloak, and departed.

Ulfgeir! Signy smiled at the strange fatuity that made her husband, in most things so shrewd a plotter, so blind where she was concerned. He had set Ulfgeir to watch her, as he had given her Valrun for a maid; the two were brother and sister. Valrun had loved one of the king's officers, and Signy secretly gave the girl a dowry out of her own brideprice. When Valrun's husband fell in battle with the Danes and the young wife, overwhelmed with grief, gave birth to a dead child, Signy's tenderness to her won Ulfgeir's devotion.

Not three months since he owed her a greater debt. Six of Siggeir's long-ships had sunk in a sudden storm, and the king, superstitious ever, laid his misfortune to spells cast by Ulfgeir's ancient mother, Gunnhild, who bore the name of a witch. By Signy's connivance the old woman had made her escape from court and now lay hidden in a distant village. Thus the brother and sister, set by Siggeir to spy on his wife, had become devoted to her. Ulfgeir was a brave man and honorable; he would do nothing to betray his master; but it would not occur to him to question too closely anything Signy might ask.

Ulfgeir entered behind Valrun, closing the door at once to shut out the keen winter air. Signy went to meet him and laid a hand on his arm.

"It is cold for you out there," she said, her face kindly anxious.

"We have a fire," he answered, touched by her concern.

"Ye need more, on such a night. Bring your men within my bower, to comfort themselves with warmth and wine for an hour. Ye can protect me here as well as a spear-cast away; and if the king's command keep you on post, ye can go back after ye are well-warmed."

Ulfgeir was a good soldier, whose valor had earned his rank; but he was slow of wit.

"It is well said," he bowed. "For myself I care little, but my men are cold. We will bide with you a little while and go back again."

He brought in his two house-carls, rough, shag-bearded champions, a little awed at their queen's graciousness; but the wine eased their minds and lightened their tongues. Within the hour they were warm, filled with good drink and overflowing with gratitude. Ulfgeir himself was very merry; he could not hold much drink. His speech thickened and he was almost maudlin with the sense of Signy's kindness to poor soldiers.

Watching, Signy urged fresh drink on him; and when he had lost all caution she heaped the measure of his devotion full by the gift of a jeweled mantle-clasp. He rose to go, bowing awkwardly over her hand.

"We must to post," he stammered. "Would I could repay your kindness, lady!"

"Thou canst," she told him in a voice low with confidence. "The king has built me this bower that I might mourn here for my brothers, slain by the wolf on this very spot. Thou rememberest? My grief for them gives me no rest. I would fain speak with their ghosts, if they will come to me. It is the only way to ease my bursting heart."

Ulfgeir nodded. He would fain have said something to comfort this gentle lady, whom he pitied with all his heart; but his wine-soaked tongue refused its service. It was some moments before his sodden mind grasped the full import of what she had said; when it did, his teeth began to chatter.

"The ghosts of the Volsungs!" he quavered. "They will come here? Nay, Odin forbid! We are Siggeir's men, their foes—they will tear us to pieces!"

Signy smiled.

"It is well known that the ghosts of the slain come back to destroy their enemies," she said, and smiled again to see the valiant knees of Ulfgeir knock together. "But they will not harm you, who have ever been kind to me. Yet since they will come from the forest, whither their flesh was borne in the body of the wolf, it were better that ye leave your post between this bower and the trees, and bide on the other side of the bower, with it between you and the wood. Then, if the ghosts of my brothers visit me, they will not see you."

Ulfgeir assented eagerly; and with all the speed his legs could compass he drove his men to fetch brands from their camp-fire to a safer post on the court side of the bower. When they were gone, Signy turned to her maid.

"Kindle a new torch!" she bade; and the woman touched a length of fat pine to the fire.

Signy reached out a hand to take it, but Valrun turned to her with anxious eyes.

"What do you with my brother, mistress?" she questioned. "Having made him drunk, you send him from his post! What if the king learn of this?"

"Trust me!" Signy answered. "I will save him from all blame, if thou and he but hold your tongues."

Signy advanced to the uncurtained window that gave on the wood and swung the torch to and fro till her arm was weary.

It was her hope that Sigmund, if he still lived, would see her signal. As she had tried everything open to her to get word to him, so she still hoped, even against reason, that he might still watch for some message from her. Only death could make him forget either his revenge or his love for her; if he lived, he must surely still think of her and wait for a sign from her. It was with this in her thoughts that she had asked Siggeir for the bower.

But though she stood by the window all night, lighting torch after torch, resting only to bid her maid take her place, no answer came from the forest. With dawn she gave over and flung herself exhausted on her bed.

With dawn, also, Ulfgeir and his men went back to their first post, very glad to have seen no Volsung ghosts. Here Siggeir found them. When he entered the bower, Signy slept so soundly that he would not waken her. She roused at last to find him standing over her.

He smiled at her heavy eyes.

"It is plain to see that you mourned last night," he said.

His voice was gentle, but there was a mocking glint in his eye. He wished to placate her and yet found it hard to cease his habitual taunting.

"And so I shall for many nights to come," she answered, "till the load of grief has left my heart."

"May that time come soon!" he said. "I like not dull faces about me."

The next night also, and the next, Signy spent like the first; and her heart sank in her breast. Surely Sigmund must come—unless he were dead! That she would not believe. Ulfgeir and his men came each night, as before, for their drink and a seat by the warm fire; when they had done, they stood guard on that side of the bower furthest from the forest. Though no ghosts came, they still feared.

On the fourth night Ulfgeir grew bolder. As he sat drinking in the bower, a thought took shape in his mind; though he said nothing of it, it grew to a firm resolve. At the wonted time he withdrew with his men; and after an hour at the fire, he stirred.

"Bide ye here, lads!" he commanded. "I go to look for ghosts!"

This was not the truth, for there was nothing he wished less to see than the ghost of Volsung, or even the least of Volsung's sons. But he was pot-valiant tonight, having drunk more than was his wont. He had never feared mortal man; and, having never seen a ghost, he thought it unlikely he should see one now. If the ghosts of Signy's kin could walk, why had they not shown themselves ere this? Three whole nights she had waited for them. It would be a brave thing to boast of to his followers, if he could tell them he had defied the spirits and walked to the very edge of the forest. Sober, he would not have dared; drunk, he deemed the risk slight and the glory great. He walked unsteadily around the house.

At the very moment of his rising, Signy drew back from her window chalk-white and opened the bower door with trembling fingers. Ulfgeir turned the corner of the building just in time to see her run toward the wood. He followed after, wondering stupidly and half-afraid. Then, suddenly, he stopped still, the hair rising on his neck. A cold wind seemed to ripple up his spine. With a howl of terror he turned and ran to his comrades. Smitten with his fright, they fled for the garth.

What he had seen was a tall shape in armour, outlined against the trees by the stream of light from the one uncurtained window. The figure was huge, far greater than man—or so it seemed to his wine-glazed, panic-dazzled eyes—majestic, mighty-limbed, bearded from eyes to waist. The shape stood motionless, as a god might stand—or a ghost! And his mind being filled with ghosts, Ulfgeir was certain that the vision boded ill.

Signy, her heart beating high with joy, ran toward the shape with outstretched arms. It moved, strode toward her, and clasped her to its mailed breast.

"Sigmund—my brother!" she whispered; and the son of Volsung held her close, stroking her golden hair.

"Night after night have I watched for you!" she panted, her voice muffled against his deep chest.

"Night after night have I come hither," he answered, "to this very spot, waiting for you. All these ten years have I waited, missing only those first weeks when I feared pursuit, and times since when I could not come. Think you I could forget?"

"But the last three nights——"

"I have been in hiding from foes, outlaws whom I hunted till they banded together, and turned the hunt against me. They cut me off from this side of the forest. Last night, thinking me far away, they slept. I crept upon them and slew them. How fares it with you?"

She wasted no words, coming straight to what was in her heart.

"I bide the time for our vengeance. And you?"

Sigmund kissed her.

"There spoke Volsung's daughter. I, too, bide my time. I am alone, like a wolf driven from the pack. Without help, I cannot strike against Siggeir, surrounded as he is by many house-carls. Had I but one stout comrade of Volsung's blood, I would find a way. But there is none—I am the last man of our line; and none but a child of Volsung would dare the perils of the vengeance I have planned."

"You would dare—with but one to help?" she questioned. "One, of Volsung's blood?"

"Ay. There is a way. Listen!" He bent to whisper in her ear.

She smiled up at him. "Then I can help you. I have two sons by Siggeir—and Volsung was grandsire to them both!"

"Thou wouldst give me a child of thine, to help me slay its own father?"

"My brother, thou canst not know my joy if a son of mine should deal the murderer of our folk his death blow."

Sigmund held her off from him, and looked long into her eyes.

"Thou art indeed a child of heroes!" he cried. "I will take thy gift—may it prove a good one! Thy sons have Volsung's blood, but they have Siggeir's also. If they are men like our father, they will serve; but if they be cowards like him who begat them, we must find other means. What is their age?"

"The elder is nine years, the younger eight. Thou art content to wait for vengeance till they are of age to help thee?"

Sigmund smiled bitterly.

"Look upon me, sister. Thou hast changed little with the years; but I am another man. Hardship and loneliness have dealt harshly with me; but so do I feel toward thy husband, that I could wait till age bent me double, and turned my strength to weakness, if waiting could make my vengeance surer, and the more cruel.

"What are the passing years? Nothing in all this earth is sweet to me, save the thought of Siggeir under my spear, and the fear of me in his eyes. Send me thy eldest son; I will make him a man, and when he is ripe, I will use him for our revenge."

Signy nodded. "Do thou come hither tomorrow night," she said. "I will have him for thee. Teach him to hate, as I hate."

"Have no fear—if he be a man!"

He kissed her, and vanished among the trees.

ULFGEIR saw him go; for Ulfgeir was no coward, and, taking his fear in his hands, he had crept back, alone, to the very bower-door. Brother and sister spoke so softly that he could hear no word; but he saw them kiss, and felt the ice of terror in his very marrow. For the great, mailed form in Signy's embrace had the carriage and face of Volsung, whom Ulfgeir had seen slain years before.

He never dreamed it was Sigmund—Sigmund he had last known as a young man, beardless and handsome; and this vision was like a man of forty, with cheeks deep-furrowed, scarred with wounds and seamed with care.

Signy found the Goth leaning against her door-post, sick from fear.

"What dost thou here?" she chided him.

"The ghost—the ghost of Volsung!" he babbled.

"It has not harmed thee, nor will it." She smiled, understanding his delusion, and bending it to her purpose.

"He will come again tomorrow night; but if nothing is said of his visits, he will spare thee and thy men. If any of ye speak of it—"

Ulfgeir raised his trembling hands, and swore eternal silence.

"Then go!" she ordered. "Find the house-carls, and bid them hold their tongues, if they would live!"

Ulfgeir, who alone knew what had frightened him, went straight to seek his men. He found them cowering in the hall, surrounded by the night guard, prating of they knew not what. They had seen no ghost; it was their officer's panic which had sent them scurrying.

His pallor loosed a flood of questions from his fellow-officers.

"A troll appeared to me, riding a wolf, with a serpent for bridle!" he lied.

"Then, by the gods, we go not back!" swore his shivering house-carls.

"Nay, fear not," he reassured them—himself still in woeful fear—"she rides to

Norway, where there is war. She promised to give us no trouble henceforth."

But it took three measures of stinging ale to give his men the courage to resume their watch over the bower.

SIGNY did not trouble to signal her brother on the following night. He had promised to come andknew the way. So she lay quiet in her bed in the darkened bower, her maid asleep at her feet, and her elder boy by her side. No light, no fire burned to betray the midnight visitor. Ulfgeir and his house-carls, having drunk themselves full to keep up courage, dozed over their camp-fire.

Signy lay with eyes closed—that she might not see; her brother, wise with the wisdom of adversity, needed no active help from her. She heard nothing save the heavy breathing of the maid; saw nothing; but, a little after midnight, she felt the boy drawn gently from her arms, and a puff of cold air from the door. She stretched out her arms and felt the warm, empty place where her son had lain; and she smiled.

"Odin grant him worthy of his grandsire's blood!" she whispered and fell into a sound sleep.

When she awoke, the dawn light was gray in the bower. Glancing at the sleeping maid, she sat upright, flung her hair into wild disorder, and shrieked. Valrun leaped from her couch, staring wildly from sleep-weighted eyes—one glance at the queen, wailing over the child's empty pillow, and the girl ran out crying for help.

Ulfgeir and his guards, heavy with ale, clanked over the threshold.

"My son, my son!" sobbed Signy. "My eldest born, the heir of my lord! He is gone!"

The soldiers cast furtive looks at each other, and at their officer. "How shall it go with us," one muttered, "when the king hears of this?"

This thought had been uppermost in Ulfgeir's mind; but he was a good man, and felt shame that his own danger troubled him more than the queen's grief.

"Into the forest!" he cried. "This is the work of some beast—wolf or bear. Search for tracks!"

He ran into the wood, the house-carls at his heels. Not one of the three but shivered to think that that which had stolen the boy might be a ghost rather than a beast of prey. Had not Ulfgeir seen a troll? Had they not feared Siggeir so much, they would not have been so swift to venture the perils of the haunted forest.

When they were gone, Signy turned to her maid.

"Thou lovest me?" she asked.

"Hast thou not always shown me kindness?" the girl replied. "As my life I love thee."

"Thou wilt not betray me, then, neither for gold nor from fear?"

Valrun looked long and steadily into Signy's eyes. "If thou hadst not trusted me," she said, "thou wouldst have sent me away before thou didst summon the ghost from the forest; and now I am sure it was the ghost that took the boy. I see it was thy will the child should go. I know not what this means; but I am content if thou art. Neither bribes shall buy thy secret from me, nor torture force it from my lips—provided no harm comes to my brother!"

"Trust me for that!" Signy agreed. "Now go to the hall, and say to the king that wolves have taken his son."

ULFGEIR and his men returned late at night, stumbling with fatigue, faint from hunger, and slow with their fear. After them straggled others, whom Siggeir had sent by scores to search for his child. No trace nor track had they found, either of man or of beast; for the ground was iron-hard with frost. They came trembling into Siggeir's presence.

The king sat in his high seat, his face twisted with grief and fury. When Ulfgeir's men approached, he rose up and stormed at them.

"Curs are ye, that make yourselves fat on my bounty, and neither bark, nor bite my foes! Ye shall hang, all three!"

But Signy cast herself at his feet, her eyes swollen with tears, her arms clasping his knees.

"Slay them not, my lord!" she begged. "Faithfully have they watched; but in the dark the gray wolf may go so soft that neither eyes can see nor ears hear him. They have served you well before, and will serve the better if you pardon them."

"Have you no love for your child?"

Siggeir raged at her. She burst into a fresh passion of grief; and he could not doubt her sorrow. But doubts of one thing he had—doubts that fed his wrath.

"Can a wolf open a door?" he cried. "This is the deed of men, not of beasts!"

"Had it been men, we should both have seen and heard," Ulfgeir ventured.

"Ye lie!" the king shouted, shaking his clenched hands at them. "It was men; and ye slept, or dared not face them!"

Ulfgeir—who had not slept, and held it impossible for any man to slip past his vigilance—drew himself up in injured pride. The recollection that he had been heavy with drink gnawed at his conscience; but this made him protest the more vehemently.

"We were not asleep!" he retorted, "nor, had we been afraid, would fear have kept us from sending one man to rouse your guard. It was either a wolf or—a ghost!"

Siggeir started as if a blade had pierced his heart. Old memories that had well nigh faded, fears he had deemed dead, surged over his guilty heart.

"A ghost?" he echoed. "Ay, a ghost indeed! It was Volsung's ghost that hath done this deed—or—perchance Sigmund lives!"

He stood stiff and still, his brain slow to cope with this new terror; but in a little while the color flowed back into his cheeks, and breath came freer. His eyes fastened on his wife, still lying at his feet.

"There has been no proof of Sigmund's death," he spoke slowly, the throbbing of his heart breaking his speech. "If he lives—after all these years—if his hand be in this, then there are those who have helped him!"

Stooping, he caught his wife's arm in iron fingers.

"Speak, thou!" he ordered fiercely. "Remember thou art more than Sigmund's sister—thou art my wife! Hast thou conspired with him to rob me of my son?"

Signy met his gaze steadily, no sign of guilt in her grief-stricken face. She seemed suddenly old; her eyes showed only truth and sorrow.

"Would I give up my own child to one who hates his father? And if so, thinkest thou that, if Sigmund lived, thou wouldst still live too? Could a living man steal past the guards, or take my child from my arms without waking me? Say thou, rather, if it was not the ghost of my father, or of one of my brethren, whom thou didst slay treacherously?"

Siggeir's glare wavered; his rage was mastered by wo and fear. Surely a mother would not willingly lose her child; and Signy was a most tender mother. He had seen her with their sons, and knew she loved them more than she had ever loved him.

It was truly much more likely that a ghost had stolen the boy than that Ulfgeir, most faithful of officers, should let a living foe slip by him. All men knew that ghosts stole children; all men knew that the ghosts of the foully slain come back to avenge themselves on their murderer. Would there be more vengeance yet? The king's limbs trembled; he sank into his seat, and covered his face with his hands.

"My son, my son!" he mourned. "Why will the dead not let me be?"

CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND STROKE

THE bower by the forest stood empty. Siggeir had decreed that none should go nigh the haunted spot. Signy bided at home, perforce, her face masked in sadness, her heart on fire with hope.

She knew she was watched; her husband, convinced though he was that the ghosts of his foes, and not their living arms, had stolen his son, yet doubted his wife. She was Volsung's daughter; might not her dead kin work their will through her?

He kept her ever by him, and at night she could not stir from his side. He was determined none should speak with her, man or ghost, without his knowledge. Yet Signy was not discouraged; there would be some way to get word to her brother. Sigmund was shrewd, and she herself no fool. She spoke not save when the king addressed her, but her eyes roved to Valrun's, whenever the maid came to her. And Valrun understood.

None thought to restrain Valrun; she was a Goth born, sister to one of Siggeir's bravest officers. Thus it chanced that Valrun—her pulses hammering with fear of the unknown—slipped out one night to the forest, ten days after the child had been taken. For most of that interval Siggeir's house-carls had quartered the forest, searching for any sign of Sigmund, living or dead; for the king, who had never taken chances in his life, meant to take none now. Men they found—outlaws, wretched things in rags and shreds of mail; half-starved folk who knew nothing, and could but whine at their own hardships.

These, wherever caught, told always the same tale: They were poor folk, who had fled to the wood to escape justice, but had done no great wrong. Nay, they had seen no man in the forest save other poor folk like themselves; but there was One that hunted them, and It they feared above all things, for It leaped upon them like the thunderbolt, slaying, and sparing none.

"Sigmund!" the king's men whispered to one another; but the outlaws shook frightened heads.

"It is no man, but a fiend—one of the offspring of Loki the Evil God!" they stammered. "We know! If it were a man, we could have slain him; but, though ten of us go against It at once, It slays, and takes no hurt. No man could do this!"

"No man indeed!" the soldiers muttered; and they reported to Siggeir that a devil haunted the wood.

To Siggeir that devil assumed the face and shape of Sigmund; but he was certain now that it was Sigmund's ghost. The searching ceased. It does no good to hunt the dead; nor would his house-carls any longer enter the forest. Thus Sigmund owed his safety to those three rascals who, long since dead, had plotted to betray him to Siggeir, and who had succeeded only in making him a terror to all their kind.

The search thus ended, Valrun found none between her and the royal garth to bar her way. Well she knew what her mistress wanted. In her own heart she thought the vision of that first night in the bower a ghost; but, recalling its seamed and worn visage, she held it for the ghost of the queen's father. Signy wanted her to find the ghost, and talk to it. She would sooner have faced pestilence or torture; but, loving her mistress as a dog loves its master, she went.

Once swallowed up by the forest, she fell a prey to her fears; all the more when the dense blackness laid its spell on her. Her feet made eerie rustling noises in the dead leaves; the forest chill struck to her heart. Ever and again she blundered into a tree, or caught her hair in its branches; twigs snapped back in her face, bringing tears to her eyes. She was in a very panic of terror when something fell hard on her shoulder. She shrieked; and a heavy hand clapped across her mouth.

But the touch of that hand, the warm reality of it, brought her courage flooding back. This was not the wan, chill touch of a ghost; it was alive like herself. The hand passed swiftly over her face, her shoulders, her hair.

"Thou art too short for Signy!" a voice rumbled. "Her servant, then?"

"Her maid, Valrun," the girl answered boldly. "She wished me to come, being close watched herself."

"What is her will?"

It was weird to hear that heavy voice, so close, yet out of a darkness so black that not a line of face or figure could be seen.

"That I know not, having had no chance to speak with her. I know only what her looks told me; that I must come and speak with thee. How didst thou find me in this dark?"

"Thy feet made noise enough to betray thee," the unseen answered. "I have watched at the forest edge since the house-carls gave up the hunt for me. It was easy to follow thee here, where none could spy upon us. So I am to speak with thee, not knowing what my sister wishes?"

"Thy sister? Thou art Sigmund, then?"

After a moment's silence the man replied:

"Since thou art faithful to my sister, I may tell thee. Ay, I am Sigmund. Tell the queen that her son is a coward, of no use to me or himself.

"He fears the beasts of the forest, fears steel, fears the look of my eyes. I have tied him up in my lair; he whines at the pain of the cords, though they are loose. Ask Signy what I shall do with him. Come to-morrow night with her answer. Now I will lead thee back, lest thou lose thyself."

* * *

ALL the next day Valrun waited her time to speak with Signy; and it came at last. Siggeir was inspecting his ships of war, seeing to their condition ere they should be shedded for the winter; he had left his queen in the hands of Radgeir—once chief of the coast-guard, now First Spear of his house-carls. This was a stern man, devoted to his lord, distrustful of all others. Signy would have no commerce with her kin, ghosts or men, so long as Radgeir lived.

But Radgeir had no orders to keep Valrun from her mistress. The two were sewing together, the girl at Signy's feet; and ever and anon Valrun would show the queen her work, as if asking approval. Signy would nod, and bend again over her task.

For some hours Radgeir watched them closely; for a little longer he watched listlessly; then he ceased to heed them at all, save to see that none came nigh them without his knowledge. When he was turned away from them, Signy—who had marked the eager light in her servant's eyes—bent over Valrun, holding her sewing as if to show the girl how the work should be done.

"Thou hast news!" she whispered; and Valrun poured out Sigmund's message as fast as her mistress could grasp the soft-uttered words.

When she understood, her face darkened with pain; but her eyes were hard.

"My son a coward!" she murmured. "Ah, the gods have spared me nothing!"

A little while she sat so, her hand clutching her heart, her eyes wet and burning; then she bent down again, and whispered—

"Say to my brother that I will send my other son as soon as may be. Mayhap he will prove his mother's child. As for the first—bid my brother look to it that the blood of Volsung shall not be reproached with flowing in a coward's veins!"

The girl shuddered; but that night she crept out again, and did as she was told.

Sigmund slew the child in its sleep.

HAVING given up his elder son for lost, Siggeir kept strictest watch over the one that was left him. He would scarce let the boy out of his sight, day or night; he took him with him on the hunt, on his royal progress from town to town, out to the farms where the king surveyed the winter care of his herds and his horses. At night the child slept in a little bed beside the royal couch; a guard was set without the chamber, and a strong force posted at each door. Even Signy was scarce allowed to see her son alone.

But Signy was patient. Ten years had she waited for her revenge; she would wait ten more, or twenty, if need were. The death of her first child had caused her little pain: he was Siggeir's son, she thought, more than hers. She had borne him, but there was none of her spirit in him. Since he was a coward, like his father, it was right that he should die.

But she hoped better things of the other. It would be sweet to know that he had his grandsire Volsung's fierce, brave heart; that one day he would avenge his kin. She never saw him without searching his innocent eyes for some sign of the high Volsung pride; she scanned his tender limbs for traces of the mighty Volsung frame that one day might be his. Those little fingers would some day swing a sword; those baby eyes kindle with the hot lust of fight.

Sigmund was weary of watching and waiting. Learning from Valrun how close a watch was kept over his sister's second son, he spent his days contriving a way to get at him. Signy could not help; Valrun had not the cunning to be more than a tool, and he could think of no way to use her. But that much Signy did for him.

"Thy mother is a witch," she said one day to Valrun, none overhearing them.

"So men say," the girl answered.

"She is a good one?"

"She can foretell the future, and brew potions; men say she makes spells that can turn men into beasts, but that is false."

"The king would kill her, if he could find her," Signy went on. "Why does she not turn her witchcraft against him?"

"For my brother's sake, and mine," Valrun explained. "Ulfgeir has forbidden her to harm the king; otherwise she would do so, for she hates him."

"Thou knowest her hiding-place?"

Valrun nodded.

"Go to her, then, tonight, and tell her what I bid thee." Signy whispered in the girl's ear; and Valrun, at first frightened, smiled after a little.

Sigmund waited long for Valrun that night; and when at last she came, Gunnhild the Witch was with her. He could not see them for the dark; but his forest-trained ear warned him that two approached the meeting-place. Waiting till they were close, he drew his sword, and bade them stand. Valrun's voice reassured him.

"I bring thee another who hates Siggeir," she said; and told him that Signy had bidden her bring him the hunted witch.

It was two nights before the Yule Feast, when, as men believe, witches and all evil powers have greater might than at other times. Having passed ten years in a forest reputed the haunt of wicked spirits, Sigmund was less afraid of the old woman than another would have been; but he was not comfortable in her presence.

"Why dost thou hate Siggeir?" he questioned her.

"Seek not to know what does not concern thee, Sigmund!" she made answer.

He was astonished at her voice. It was clear, like the sound of a flute, with no trace of age marring it; and she spoke with the force of one who expects to be listened to. He took her up sharply; for he was no man to be cowed by an old woman, witch or no.

"How does my name concern thee?" he asked.

"Mayhap I seek an ally against my enemy; mayhap thou canst use my help. What better ally can I have than one who seeks blood-vengeance on him who has harmed me? What better help canst thou have than mine, when none other is offered thee?"

Sigmund did not ask what pledge of good faith she could offer: her presence there, with Valrun, and the message from Signy, were surety enough.

"How canst thou help me?" he demanded. "Wilt thou cast a spell on Siggeir, that he may go mad, and rush into the forest, where I may seize him?"

The witch laughed; and the sound of it was music. Its youthfulness, in one old enough to be Ulfgeir's mother, was grislier than any display of fallen chops, beaked nose, or hooked chin.

"Nay, for I have sworn to work no magic on him. But I can give thee a sleeping potion, and leave the rest to thee."

Valrun stood silent, her arm in her weird mother's; and to her it was a grim and awful thing to hear those two voices from the dark, each edged with hate, each seeming more than human in the power and daring of the speaker. They spoke and answered unseen, like disembodied spirits. When the girl spoke, it was to calm her own terrors more than to offer help.

"Why should not I administer the potion?" she asked. "Being of the court, I can go about in it unquestioned, whereas Sigmund risks death."

"Because thou art my daughter, bound by my oath!" the old woman retorted. "If thou wert caught, it would go hard with Ulfgeir. This is Sigmund's affair; let him manage it."

While the old woman spoke, Sigmund's plan had been forming. His heart glowed with renewed hope.

"Where do they keep their drink?" he questioned.

"The ale-casks lie in a shed beyond the kitchens," Valrun answered, "far enough from the fire to freeze."

SIGMUND understood, for he knew the custom. The Yule Feast was the great winter festival to the gods. Since it was not fit that men should drink ordinary liquor on such a high occasion, the strongest ale was chosen, and set where all would freeze save an inner core, which would take on triple strength through the absorption of the water in the frozen rim. Of this thrice-strengthened core the warriors would drink their Yule toasts; and few would go to bed on their own feet.

He laughed scornfully, thinking how he would play with Siggeir's Yule drink.

"On which side of the garth is the ale-house?" he asked, "and how near the palisade?"

"Within ten paces, on the south."

"Then bid my sister drink sparingly!"

The witch Gunnhild echoed his laugh, and touched his shoulder with her cold fingers.

"It is given me to see somewhat into hidden things," she said. "I tell thee now, Sigmund, that in this which thou art about to undertake thou shalt succeed; and yet thou shalt fail. Nor will thy vengeance be fulfilled till thou hast the help of one in whom Volsung's blood is untainted by Siggeir's!"

"What mean these riddles?" he asked angrily. "And what is thy concern in my vengeance?"

The witch answered slowly, with a touch of bitterness:

"My hate of Siggeir is like thine—it must be slaked, whatever the cause. Thou strikest for us both; and it is revealed to me that in thy success there shall be black misery for us both. Yet thou must go on to thy destiny, and I must help thee. Thou hadst a sword once, which Siggeir now has; with it thou shalt win vengeance."

"No spirit revealed that to thee!" Sigmund retorted. "All the North knows of that sword!"

"More shall be known of it ere the tale be done!" she answered.

He snatched at her arm, resolved to know more; but she darted from him, and Valrun with her. Though he followed swiftly, keeping on their track by the sound of the leaves that crackled under their feet, they reached the open before him. He dared not approach closer to the court.

The witch's voice drifted back to him as he halted:

"Tell the queen, my daughter, what I have said to her brother!"

KOL, the butler's knave, slept lightly, being troubled with thirst at night. It was his task not only to watch the casks, to broach them when fresh ale was wanted, and to help serve; but also to sample the drink every day, so that only the strongest and best might be set aside for the Yule Feast.

The constant taste of the liquor made him crave more; he was the driest thrall in all Gothland. Thrice each night he rose from his warm couch by the coals of the kitchen fire, and ventured into the freezing night, without a light, to pay unwarranted visits to the casks.

The night before Yule, being so afflicted at the accustomed hour, he rose, and thrust his nose into a driving snow storm—the first of the winter, which had been unwontedly dry and cold. With his accustomed stealth he crossed the garth and crept toward the shed. As he pushed the door open—ever so softly, lest the hinges creak—he was aware of a light in the windowless building; and, peering in, he saw a huge man, muffled in a bearskin, bending over the casks. The man's face was half hidden by the bear's head, which had been made so cunningly into a cowl that the teeth leered above the wearer's brow, and the hair of the neck swathed his cheeks and throat. The visitor held a flaming pine-splinter in his hand, and had broached a cask. Kol had made marks on those set aside for the feast, and saw that the man had chosen one of the marked kegs.

Only Kol's face projected into the shed, and this he withdrew quickly, filling his lungs for a cry of alarm. But ere he could scream, the bear-man shot out one great arm. His iron fingers wrapped themselves about Kol's throat. Kol had no time to struggle; the hand closed, and Kol's throat became straightway useless for ale-tasting.

Lowering the corpse to the rough board floor, the visitor closed the door again, and went on with his task. Each marked cask he broached; into each he dropped some unseen thing, and plugged the cask again. At last, extinguishing the torch, he dragged the lifeless Kol outside, and scanned the palisade. It was unguarded; on such cold nights the guards slept indoors, with sentries posted only at the doors of hall and bower, and in the loft.

The intruder propped Kol against the palisade, reached up, and drew himself to the top; then, hooking his ankles about the posts, he hung head down and dragged Kol over.

The next day, at dawn, Kol was sent for; but none found him.

AT THE second cock-crow on the night of the feast, Sigmund scaled the stockade again. This time he strode straight to the main door of the hall. His sword was loose in its sheath; but he looked for no resistance. He knew Valrun would have told his sister of his plan; and Signy would see to it that all in the court drank deep that Yule. The sleeping potion would clear a way for him.

He thrust the door; but it held, and he knew the bar was down. Setting his great shoulders against the planks, he heaved, and heaved thrice before the bar burst from its socket. Over the threshold he strode, and over the drunken bodies of the guard.

The dying coals glowed red in the fire-pits, casting a ruddy light over tables littered with empty dishes, fouled platters, overturned ale cups, gleaming like blood on the drink-puddled floor. The snoring of besotted men disturbed the reeking air. At every step Sigmund passed the sprawling body of some house-carl, drunk and drugged, half under the tables. Officer lay cheek by jowl with spearman, counsellor with serving-groom. Sneering, Sigmund made for the bower.

His hand sought his sword, only to drop by his side. This was the night of his vengeance, the crown of his bleak, bitter life. The Yule feast had done its work; his enemy slept, drunk, unguarded by his snoring house-carls. The son of Volsung meant to slake, this night, the hate that had burned his heart so many years. He would not bury his sword in Siggeir's drugged body; that way the Goth would never know who slew him.

He would bear away the sleeping Siggeir as he had done the slain Kol, carry him off to the depths of the forest, and cherish him till he woke. Then—Sigmund thought of his murdered father, of his brothers torn by the wolf, of Signy, bound in wretched wedlock to a coward. All this he would avenge this night—and he would win back his precious sword, which Siggeir had shamefully stolen.

The bower lay behind the hall, with direct access to it in case of attack. Its door also Sigmund burst in, and found the room dimly lighted by a single torch.

Even as he followed the door inward, Sigmund was aware of many forms that leaped up from couches, benches, and skins laid on the floor. Steel flashed; men's voices cried a confused alarm. Headlong, bewildered by sleep and surprize, eight house-carls rushed to meet the intruder.

Sigmund's sword flashed. He stood with braced feet, waiting the onset; and as the first blade met his, he cried in a mighty voice:

"Volsung!"

At his shout, the house-carls fell suddenly back, their faces blanched with terror. Hands went to faces; weapons clattered to the floor. Sigmund understood: To them his face, aged and seared by grief and hate, and by long solitude, was not the face of Sigmund, but of Sigmund's father; and his cry had seemed to them the name of the dead on a dead man's lips. To them he was Volsung's ghost, come from the grave for vengeance. He smiled dreadfully, and stalked across the bower to the royal couch. None moved to bar his way; those nearest him drew back as he passed by.

In the bed lay Siggeir, his wife by his side; close by, in a little, rough-carved bed, slept their second child. Siggeir slumbered heavily, with grunts and stertorous snores, mastered by the drugged ale. Signy lay with eyes wide open, smiling up at her brother.

"Our night, Sigmund!" she whispered; and he bent to seize his sleeping foe. The sight of the hated face, the thought of the vengeance now in his hands, set his heart throbbing. He thought no more of his god-given sword; he heeded nothing save his foe. His hands trembled with the excitement of his triumph—trembled so that, when he would have sheathed his blade to free both hands, he scratched his left wrist with its point. At the touch of the sharp-ground steel, blood welled from the cut, red against his fair skin.

Unheeding, he dragged Siggeir from the bed; but as he lifted the Goth, a shout rang out in the bower—

"He bleeds! He is no ghost! Only the living bleed! Slay him!"

It was the officer of the watch—Radgeir, First spear of the house-carls.

Sigmund must needs drop Siggeir to draw sword again; and as he did so, a Gothic spearman snatched Siggeir's feet and drew him swiftly away. It was neatly done, and the king was out of immediate danger. No sooner was the way cleared than the house-carls charged again, furious that they had been so nearly befooled.

Sigmund met them fiercely, mad to think that he had not foreseen Siggeir would forbid a few at least of his guards to drink, when he knew the rest might be too drunk to defend him. Siggeir was a fox, that always kept an earth open.

Blade clashed with blade, Sigmund in the corner between the royal couch and the child's bed. He must cut his way through or perish, for the house-carls blocked his way to the door. There was a window in the wall above the couch, but it was barred. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Signy fling the warm furs from her, and strain at the window-bar. It flew up, and she threw the window open.

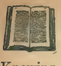
Leaping in, Sigmund thrust his point through a house-carl's throat; his left hand seized the corpse, and hurled it full in the faces of the nearest foes. With the spring of a mountain-cat he pounced upon the bed, snatched up the wakened and whimpering boy, and flung himself through the window. He had barely dragged the child through after him, when a cast spear flashed above his head.

The baffled guards made some for the door, some to follow him by the window; but Signy slammed the shutter to in their faces. In the moment needed to drag her away and unbar it, Sigmund had reached the stockade gate with his prey, run back the bars, and made his escape.

The pursuers came back after a little. Radgeir scowled at Signy, and pointed to the drugged king.

"When he awakes," the officer said darkly, "it will go ill with thee for this."

Signy nodded, thinking fast. She feared not death; but she had no wish to die before her vengeance was fulfilled. Yet she could contrive no plan to save herself. When Siggeir knew that her brother—a living man—had broken into the hall, stolen their second child, and all but carried off Siggeir himself; when Radgeir reported that she had helped Sigmund escape—then the last of her days would be numbered.



FATE, or her gods, saved her. Hot with the chase, Radgeir went to hunt drink, and found it in a half-empty cask in the hall. Knowing not that his comrades there were drugged—thinking their stupor but that of drunken sleep—he drank deep, calling to his men to share the brew now that the danger was past. They drank; and when Signy understood what had happened her eyes glowed. Waiting only till the drug had time to take effect, she ran to the hall, leaving her husband asprawl on the bower floor.

The eight house-carls lay in a heap where they had fallen, save for Radgeir, whose eyes were just filming with the potion. Before he lost consciousness, he saw her bending over him, a grim smile on her lips; and he strove to focus his eyes to glare at her. She smiled as he slipped to the floor; smiled and shuddered, for the task before her pleased her little.

Plucking Radgeir's sword from its scabbard, she thrust it through his throat. Then, having slain the other seven one by one, she cast the sword on the floor.

"There are none to betray me now!" she muttered. "I shall live—till Siggeir dies!"

She forced a drinking horn from the hand of one of the slain carls, filled it, and bore it back to the bower. Then, lying down again on the couch, and drawing the furs over her, she drained the drugged liquor.

"Now even he can not suspect me!" she smiled, and flung the horn through the open window.

SIGMUND crouched in his cave behind the brawling waterfall. His spirit was black within him: the dream of his life, having flaunted its red promise suddenly before him, had as suddenly ended in illusion. It was as Gunnhild the Witch had foretold. He had succeeded—in stealing the boy; in his one great venture to achieve his revenge he had failed.

Siggeir, all but in his hands, drugged, helpless, had yet been too shrewd for him. Not only that; having captured the boy, and borne him all the way through the forest, Sigmund had found this last hope also vain. In the lad had lain his one last chance—the chance that Signy's son might inherit the flaming spirit of Volsung, and, under Sigmund's nurture, prove the instrument of vengeance. But the boy was a coward, like his brother.

Sigmund had endured his whimperings, as he strode with the child in his arms through the bleak forest dawn. He knew that even strong men feared that haunted wood.

But when he set him down at last in the cave, the boy shrieked at the dim loom of Sigmund's figure, and the gray light filtering through upon his grim face; and when the son of Volsung drew his sword, to test the lad's power to endure steel, the last of Signy's sons buried his face in his arms, and whined for mercy.

"Thy mother has borne another coward," Sigmund spoke in the dull tones of one who sees his life turn to ashes. "It is an ill trick of fate that her honest Volsung blood is weaker in her sons than the base blood of Siggeir. Now will I remove from the earth the reproach that thy life casts upon her!"

"SIGGEIR is mad with grief," said Valrun; and in the forest darkness Sigmund smiled bitterly. "Little comfort is that to my sister, who gives birth only to weaklings."

"Thou hast slain him too?"

Sigmund felt the horror in the girl's voice.

"Would Signy have had it otherwise?"

"Nay!" Valrun answered. "Better be childless than have such sons. She will say thou hast done well. But what is to be done now? She has no more sons to give thee; and if she had, they would surely be no better."

"I know not," Sigmund answered slowly. "Last night was the end. Siggeir, too cunning to leave himself wholly unguarded then, will not be less shrewd another time. It is too great a task for one man; and now I have no more hope of another to help me."

"Thou hast not Signy's high heart," the maid reproached him. "She still hopes. I am to tell thee that she will send thee one of her women, whom thou canst take to wife, and by whom thou mayest have a son equal to thyself in valor."

Sigmund started. Outcast that he was, of necessity alone, friendless, companionless, he had never thought of a wife. But he nodded to himself in the darkness. It would be best—if it were possible—to beget his own son, a man in whom the blood of Volsung should run strong.

Perchance this was what the witch had meant with her riddle: "Nor will thy vengeance be fulfilled till thou hast the help of one in whom Volsung's blood is untainted by Siggeir's!" Could it be so, then, when his son grew to manhood, he would be a worthy comrade! Between them they would find a way to revenge. He thought a moment, frowning; then—

"Bid my sister see to it that she sends me a woman without fear!"

Valrun smiled to herself. "The queen bids me say that it will be the daughter of noble folk, whose sires have never fled nor feared. If she give thee a son, thou shalt have cause to rejoice in him!"

"My sister has a great heart!"

"Well mayest thou say so, Son of Volsung! Never has the earth known such a woman!"

"When will my bride come?"

"Tomorrow night. It will be easy; in the throes of grief for his son, and his new fears for himself, Siggeir heeds naught else. He is surrounded by his guards, who are allowed no drink. Farewell—be here tomorrow an hour after dusk!"

CHAPTER VII

ONE WITHOUT FEAR

"THOU hast a well-hid house!"

The woman's voice was low and somewhat thick, hard to understand. She spoke in the broad Gothland tongue, much like Sigmund's own, but fuller-throated, and harsh.

Sigmund laid fagots in the cold fire-pit, and drew out flint and steel; but the woman, groping for him in the darkness of the cave, seized his arm.

"Though I am come to be thy wife, thou knowest naught of me!" she said. "How should there be love between us? The queen has ordered me, and I obey; but thou shalt not see my face till I have learned to love thee."

Sigmund smiled.

"When morning comes, I can not fail to see thee."

"Wait till then!"

"But it is cold without fire—too cold for a woman!"

She laughed harshly.

"What care I for cold?"

Sigmund's heart swelled at her words. The winter air was bitter in the cave, numbing the limbs. If this woman feared not the chill of winter, there would be little that she would fear. She should give him brave sons.

Ay, why not? Not one son merely, to help him slay Siggeir; but many—as many as the sons of Volsung! Why should not the House of Volsung rise again from its ruins, in their children? He would be great in their strength, as his father had been, and establish himself an empire here in Gothland. Ay, he would win back Frakkland, and set his foot on the necks of kings.

His eyes sought to pierce the darkness of the cave. This woman who was to be his wife was strong, he knew that; she had kept pace with him through the forest, needing no help save the touch of his hand to guide her; and, putting an arm about her shoulders, he found her strongly made. Yet he longed to see her eyes, that he might read in them the nature of her heart.

"Thou art well-born?" he asked, remembering Valrun's words.

"As well-born as thyself, and of as brave folk."

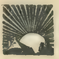
"That is saying much. Dost thou fear steel?"

Her answer was prompt and certain, with the quiet confidence of one who does not boast—

"Neither steel, nor fire, nor venom—and least of all the strength of men!"

"Then thou art a mate for me!" And groping in the dark, he put his arm about her, and kissed her.

"Wed me by the holy sign of Thor!" she commanded; and he obeyed, making the mark of the hammer above her head, and on his own breast.



SIGMUND was awake with the first light, that filtered late behind the waterfall. He rubbed his eyes, turned toward the woman's place, to see her face. She was gone.

Long he called and sought her through the forest; but never again was he to hear that low, harsh voice, nor to clasp her in his arms.

"A strange wife my sister gives me!" he muttered, as he made his weary way homeward at dusk. He was very sorrowful, for he loved her high spirit, her utter fearlessness, that had neither shrunk from him nor endured his taming.

He was very lonely that night, and lonelier in the long, long years that passed before he again saw Signy, or heard the footfall of Valrun, who came no more to the forest to bring him tidings of his foe.

As his loneliness oppressed him, so his hate—which he had thought as great as a man might feel and live—rose higher and hotter against Siggeir. His heart, deceived in its hope of love, grew bitterer in his breast. Often he would wake from sound sleep, to find his hand clenched on his sword-hilt. With the swelling of his hatred came not only new dreams of vengeance, but also a strange, cold patience to wait for it till the time was ripe.

Many a night he stood on the verge of the forest, straining eyes and ears for sight and sound of Signy, or the maid her messenger—always with the faint hope that he might find his wife, who had come to him unseen, and left him unseen; and always with the hate for Siggeir so strong within him that it tasted salty on his tongue. None came to him; no word was sent; all he saw was the far-off lights of the hall, all he heard, the faint, shrill echoes of the guard challenging some late-comer from the gate.

So passed eleven years; and Sigmund's hair and golden beard were touched with gray; yet nothing broke his loneliness, nor fed his vengeance-hungry heart. More mercilessly than ever he hunted the outlaws in the wood, who would have fled and left it utterly to him, had they had any other refuge.

Only in the hot flurry of fight could he find relief, or joy in life; and then it was but the fierce, swift-passing joy of the beast in its kill. And beneath all, under his lonely brooding and under the flashing redness of fight, burned that steady, patient, yet consuming flame of hate.

The life in the forest kept his limbs supple and his sinews hard, though his youth was gone. His face was printed deep with the scores of his bitter thoughts, so that it seemed old and savage; and the desperate men that skulked in the thickets fled from him in terror.

In the spring of the twelfth year, when the forest was spongy with the thaw, and the streams released from the fetters of the ice rushed frothing between flooded banks, Sigmund, one soft night, found Valrun waiting him as she had done so often years ago. With her was another. There was a moon that night; and it was only by the greatest stealth, long after all save the door-wards slept, that the two had made their way to him.

By the pale light, Sigmund saw the maid's face for the first time. She was a girl no longer; her face was lined, and the silver in her hair was not all from the moon-beams.

But his eyes dwelt less on her than on the boy by her side. He was not yet eleven, but he looked fifteen, so big and sturdy was he. His arms were full and firm, his legs thick and planted like twin towers. The eyes of him glittered in the moonlight, resting full and steady on Sigmund's. Fair of hair he was, with a large, shapely head and strong jaws.

"What is this?" asked Sigmund; wondering.

"Thy son!" Valrun answered. "Take him—he is worthy of thee!"

Sigmund stared, at first uncomprehending; then—

"My son?" he echoed. "And—my wife?"

"She is well; but she will not return to thee."

"She fears me, then?"

Valrun laughed scornfully. "Look upon her son and thine, and say if his mother knew fear! Nay, but she loves thee!"

"Then why does she hide from me—why steal from my life the one joy it has known?"

Valrun eyed him strangely. "Mayhap she knew that love would make thee forget thy vengeance!" And she ran from him before he could question her further.

The boy remained, his bright eyes fixed questioningly on his father's.

"Wilt thou take me?" he asked. His voice was high, as became his age; but there was no fear nor doubt in it.

But Sigmund, having been disappointed twice, was wary.

"If I take thee," he answered, "thou shalt learn to know hunger, cold, and—fear!"

The boy put out his arms, his face aglow with eagerness.

"Take me then, my father! Much have I heard of fear, but never have I found it. Fain would I know what it is like!"

"This is fear," said Sigmund; and drawing his sword, he laid its sharp edge on the boy's throat. The lad moved not, but waited, fascinated. Softly Sigmund drew the blade a little to one side, so that drops of blood beaded the white young skin.

The child laughed. "Is that fear?" he asked, his voice scornful. "Nay, that is pain, which I know well. It is not pleasant, but I have felt worse."

Sigmund sheathed his sword.

"How?" he questioned.

"My mother. She told me often that I was destined for brave deeds; and, saying that I must be hardened to pain if I would become great, she showed me pain daily. She burned me with fire, made me sleep without covering on winter nights, scratched me with steel."

"And in all this thou hast not found fear?"

The boy gave him back look for look. "What is fear?" he retorted.

Sigmund held out his hand.

"Come!" he said.

Together they hastened through the forest, the boy half-running to keep up with his father's long strides; yet never did he falter, or ask for rest. When they reached the cave, Sigmund lifted his son to its mouth, and bade him lie down on his own bearskin.

"What is thy name?" he asked.

"Sinfiotli."

"Tomorrow, Sinfiotli, I will show thee fear!"

When morning came, Sigmund took him by the hand, and led him to the brook. There, among the stones, the father searched long; and at last he said:

"Run back to the cave, and fetch me flour from the bag that hangs on the wall. Make haste!"

While Sinfiotli was gone, Sigmund bent down among the stones of the stream-bed, and with a motion swift as thought, seized a viper that was sunning there. His great fingers held the creature just behind the head, so that it could not twist to strike. Forcing its mouth open with his knife, he tore out its fangs.

When Sinfiotli came running back, Sigmund took the flour from him, wrapped in birch-bark. Pinning the bark together with a thorn, so that it made a dish, he stirred the flour till it was all mixed—acorn meal with the ground inner bark of the birch—cupped water into the dish, forced the writhing viper into the dough, and kneaded it into a spongy mass. The boy looked on with eager eyes.

"Knead thou!" commanded Sigmund, taking his own hands from the dough.

Sinfiotli laughed.

"One does not knead poisonous serpents with good bread!"

"Dost thou fear, then?"

Pain clutched Sigmund's heart, for he loved the boy already. His own son, who feared not steel, fire, nor cold! Was a crawling viper to prove him a coward? Though it cost him dear, Sigmund half drew his sword. If his son was afraid, he must die, as Siggeir's sons had died.

But Sinfiotli thrust his hands into the dough, and kneaded vigorously, despite the viper's struggles. Once its head broke through the smothering dough, and with desperation it struck at the boy's hand. Laughing, Sinfiotli pushed it back.

"Enough!" cried Sigmund, beyond himself with relief and joy. He tore the dish from his son's hands, and caught him in his arms.

"Thou art mine indeed, blood of my blood and heart of my heart! No fear is in thee. Thou art of the true Volsung stuff and Volsung spirit!"

As he kissed the boy, he was overwhelmed by the swift memories that the eager young face brought to his mind. The strong, firm features, the broad, heavy-boned face, the sparkling eyes—all recalled to him his own father; and all were Sigmund's own as he had been long ago. Sigmund trembled with pure joy as the two went home together.

That day began the boy's training. Already so inured to pain that he laughed at it, Sinfiotli quickly learned to live as his father's son must live. Daily the two hunted together, swam together in the cold woodland streams, together scaled the rough, tree-clad crags. Armed with bow and spear, they faced the bear, surly with its spring hunger; they turned on the wolf-pack, and beat it back, Sinfiotli striking out with his light spear with ready hand and lip curled in defiance. In danger the lad laughed aloud, and bore his own part, for all his tender years.

For hours each day Sigmund taught him the use of weapons, now and again giving him slight cuts, that his son might learn to face steel without wincing; nor did he flinch once. What he learned he had many an opportunity to put to use; for Sigmund took him out often against the outlaws, who now were driven out of all but the least accessible crags of the wild forest, where they stood desperately at bay. With the passing months and years Sinfiotli grew ever more skilful; and the growing swiftness and strength of him caused the father to marvel and rejoice.

"Truly it is a young champion that I have begotten!" he cried to his heart; and he longed with a mighty longing to find and cherish the wife that had given him such a child.

WHEN the youth reached manhood, Sigmund told him of his destiny; but Sinfiotli, flexing his mighty arms, made answer:

"All this my mother told me. Now have I spent nine years with thee, my father; and ever have I waited for thee to tell me when we shall go out to slay our enemy. I had come to think thou hadst forgotten."

Sigmund stared at him. "Thou knowest—all? Thou wilt help me kill Siggeir?"

Sinfiotli ground his teeth together, his young face twisted with rage. "Do I not know," he cried, "all the treason of Siggeir? Have I not thy sufferings, and my grandsire's death to avenge? So soon as I could talk, my mother told me daily of the wrongs of my kindred. Wilt thou never take me to slay that dog of a Goth?"

The father marvelled how the woman he had known but for a night should have so felt his wrongs that she had trained her child from its cradle to hate his enemies. How could she, who had not time to love her husband, and had abandoned him, so burn with fury against Siggeir? Yet in his heart he remembered Valrun's words of her, "She loves thee!"

"What is thy mother's name?" he asked; nor was this the first time he had put the question.

Sinfiotli answered as he had done before—

"She bade me keep it from thee; nor does one of Volsung's blood break his word."

Sigmund bit his lip. He was a hard man, and liked not to be crossed; but he knew it was right that his son should keep faith. When he spoke, it was to answer Sinfiotli's earlier question—

"In courage and in skill thou art ready, now, to be my comrade. But there is yet one fault in thee: Thou hast no prudence. I was once even as thou art—rash, headlong in fight, heeding not what wounds I took if I might but destroy my foe. Misfortune and years taught me caution. Some men gain it through fear; but thou hast no fear, and art too young to learn from another's lips how to join shrewdness with courage. Until thou art warier, thou wilt be as dangerous to friend as to foe. Siggeir is so cunning that valor alone is not enough to overcome him. I fear the outcome if I let thee face him now.'"

Sinfiotli leaped to his feet, his eyes eager. "If caution is all I lack, then teach me caution now!"

His father smiled. "That thou must learn through suffering, my son. Come; we will go out, and see if thou canst learn!"

They put on their mail, and girded on their weapons.

"This birnie is tight for me," Sinfiotli grumbled; and Sigmund, looking, saw that his son had grown bigger of girth and limb than himself.

Eastward four hours' march through the forest lay a jumbled welter of cliff and ravine, where streams swollen with spring thaws had cut a tortuous way through sheer granite.

Masses of jagged rock overhung the deep stream-beds, and trees whose roots found scant nourishments in the stony soil had fallen in confusion among the boulders. There were no trails; dense undergrowth had sprung up to fill the gaps left by the fallen forest giants. Here, in caves in the walls of a wild gorge, dwelt that hardy remnant of the outlaws whom Sigmund had driven from their lairs in the forest. Sound wind and strong limbs must he have who would reach them here; courage and keen eyes as well, to evade ambush. Hither Sigmund led his son, that he might learn caution.

"Till now we have hunted together," Sigmund said as they approached the outlaw fastness. "Now we hunt apart. Each of us will fight his own battles, unless he meets more than seven men. I have faced and slain ten; but I am old in the craft of war. Thou, reckless as thou art, canst not stand against so many. So let whichever of us first meets more than his match give the wolf-howl, and the other will come to his help. More than seven I hold to be too many."

Sinfiotli was off like an arrow, dodging and twisting through the undergrowth. For a while Sigmund watched the bushes shake and close behind him; but soon he was lost to sight in the broken ground. Turning, Sigmund set about his own hunting.

He had not far to seek. Half-climbing, half-crawling to the edge of the ravine, he gazed down into its depths; and there, far down, he saw a fine stag drinking from a swirling pool. As he gazed, an arrow feathered in the stag's flank; and two men bounded out from a fringe of willows that edged the stream.

Casting his cumbrous shield aside, Sigmund set about the descent. From ledge to ledge he crawled, finding precarious foothold on the slippery rocks, helping himself with one hand whenever a sturdy root or overhanging branch offered safe grip. He was safe from arrows, for the gorge was too high and narrow for a fair shot; but as he reached the last ledge, and turned to jump down, one of the hunters launched a savage spear-thrust.

Sigmund saved himself by a quick sideleap that threw him on his face. Instantly the two flung themselves on him. One he struck in the face with his upflung foot; as the man reeled back, Sigmund turned on one side and launched his own spear. In that moment the second man drove a knife at his throat. The blade glanced on Sigmund's mailed arm, and slashed his wrist. Then he was up, his sword out.

His spear-thrust had missed; but now he was on his feet, the two would not face him. They gave way, leaping into the shallows, casting quick glances about them for a way of escape. Sigmund pressed them close—so close that they grew desperate. One rushed in, sword flashing; the other whistled shrilly, twice, and fitted arrow to string, though the range was too short for safety.

The rocks rang with answering whistles; shouts rang from behind and above; stones pelted down about Sigmund's ears from both sides. He paused one instant, threw back his head, and howled like a wolf; then he rushed upon the first two. His blade split one man's skull even as the other loosened his shaft, which sped harmless over Sigmund's shoulder. Straightway Sigmund was on him and beneath his guard. The death-stroke went home; but before he could wrench out his sword, Sigmund crashed down in a rocky pool, flung headlong by a stone between the shoulders.

He expected death; for, though he could not see them, he knew the outlaws were all about him. Up he staggered, his back against the wall of the gorge, his legs in water to the thighs, head sheltered by an out-jutting ledge; and here Sinfiotli, hastening to answer his father's summons, found him. The young man's sword was red.

"Four I slew on the rim of the ravine!" he boasted proudly. "Art thou hurt?"

Sigmund shook his head.

"Thou hast done well!" he praised the lad. "They have fled from thee! Now go about thy hunting, and call me if thou needest such help as thou hast given me."

When Sinfiotli had disappeared once more, Sigmund, angry and ashamed at his failure to take care of himself, beat through the ravine all day long, seeking any who would face him. But the outlaws had had enough; no man showed his head. Toward sunset he clambered to the ridge again. The exertion of his climb drove the anger from his brain; he began to wonder why he had heard nothing more from his son.

Striking south along the crest, he came upon the lad's track. It was easy to follow, for Sinfiotli had blundered through the thickets like an angry bull; and Sigmund was wise in the ways of the forest. For an hour he tracked his son, till the sky was red and the dusk settling. At last, descending into a little clearing, he found him.

SINFIOTLI lay under a great oak that stood alone in the clearing. He was sound asleep, his arms flung wide and his mail unbraced; and both hands were red with blood. Three burly outlaws sprawled, dead, about his feet, and others dotted the clearing. Sigmund counted twelve slain in all. They had died hard, for Sinfiotli's shield was hacked to pieces, his mail rent, the ground about him stuck with arrows and broken spear-shafts.

Sigmund shook him awake.

"Fool," he cried, as the exhausted champion opened heavy eyes. "Fool! When a man goes forth to learn caution, does he engage twelve men without calling for help? And having slain them, would any but a madman lie down to sleep in their country, within sight of their friends? Verily it would be better for us both if thou couldst feel a little fear!"

Sinfiotli was angry. "I am as thou didst make me!" he retorted. "Do thou be cautious for both of us, and I will fight for both!"

For a moment father and son glared at each other; then Sigmund laughed, though without much mirth.

"If I wait for thee to get wisdom, we shall never slay Siggeir! I will take thee as thou art, and may Odin help us both! We go forth to seek our vengeance as soon as thou art healed of thy wounds!"

CHAPTER VIII

FEAR COMES

LATE of a hot, moonless night the two drew near the garth of Siggeir; and Sinfiotli, reckless with lust for battle, would have stalked boldly forward to the gate. His father caught him by the arm.

"Hast thou not yet learned that one man cannot slay fifty?" he rebuked him. "We must do this thing with cunning."

Sinfiotli grumbled, but obeyed. Softly, with infinite stealth, the two crept toward the stockade. Close they drew and closer; till, with a sudden run, they reached the gate-posts, and crouched behind the wall, one on either side of the gate.

From where they lurked they heard the boasting and laughter of the guards. Picked house-carls were these, as was plain from their bragging.

"On such a night," said one, "we bear the fate of this kingdom in our hands. When the moon shines not, foes bestir themselves, and good guards are needed. Were an enemy to come, I would slay six with my own hand, as I did once in Denmark."

Another laughed, somewhat scornfully. "Thou art a brave man, Thorleif," he said, "but a hireling and a foreigner. Here in Gothland we have no foes. The whole island is Siggeir's. Such enemies as he has must come from afar in ships, and deal with the coast-guard before they can threaten us. Were not our king a coward, he would post no sentries here at his gate, for none of Gothland dare attack him."

Thorleif, a champion new-hired from Denmark, grunted at this news.

"Then why must we bide here?" he asked. "There is good ale and meat in the kitchen. Let us go thither; the king will not ask for us."

A low murmur rose at his words; but one of the house-carls, thirsty with the summer heat, backed him eagerly.

"We will leave one man," he proposed, "to stand watch while the others go. In the order determined by the dice, we will return one by one, relieving the watcher; and so we will do till all are satisfied."

The two lurking in the dark smiled to themselves; and still more when the guards fell to dicing by the light cast from the hall, to settle which should first remain behind. Quarrels there were, and low curses, ere the lot fell first to the Dane. With good-natured mockery the others left him.

No sooner had they disappeared when Sinfiotli sprang up, and tapped softly at the gate.

"Who comes?" the Dane challenged; and the young man answered:

"News for the king! Open swiftly, and make no noise! It is not for the ears of all Gothland."

Having just been assured that Siggeir had no enemy in all the kingdom, the Dane did not hesitate. The bars grated, and the gate opened. Sinfiotli was inside in a single bound, his hands locked about the Dane's throat so that he could not give the alarm. The watchfire being between them and the hall, none saw. The braggart did not slay his six men that night. He was dead in an instant.

"Softly now!" Sigmund whispered, as his son eased the corpse down. "Thrust him outside the garth, where they will not see him. Now creep up to the porch; if any come, drop to the ground!"

The hall door was open, for the heat within, where a dozen torches blazed, was too great for comfort. A path of light lay along the steps, and over the floor of the four-square porch with its carven pillars. But to the left of the door was a space where no light fell; for here were two great ale-tuns, empty and thrust out to air. Behind these the two of Volsung's kindred hid, watching their chance, raising their heads from shelter now and again to peer into the hall.

SIGGEIR sat not on his high seat, but at one of the benches below the dais, his head cupped in one hand. Across the table, on which was bread and ale, Signy was busy with her needle. Two children—her last-born—played about the rough pine floor with a toy that glittered yellow in the torch-light. It was a pretty golden thing, that rolled at a touch, and made a merry tinkling as it moved.

Sigmund touched his son's shoulder. "Be wary!" he whispered. "Move not till I give the word. I have tinder and dry bark in my pouch; but if they see or hear us first ——"

Sinfiotli, impatient ever, and chafing at the implied rebuke, raised his head again to watch his enemy. Siggeir sat like one overburdened with sadness. He was an old man now, broken with age and sorrow; but he had lost none of his coward's love of life. Now and again he raised his head, and glanced with a smile at his boys; but when his eyes fell on Signy, they gleamed frostily. The last years of their life together had been still less happy than the first.

"Five fine sons might I have had," he spoke in sudden bitterness, "hadst thou watched thy children with a mother's love!"

"Five?" Sigmund whispered. "Two slain, two here; but the fifth?"

"Ten brave brothers might I have had," Signy retorted quietly, "hadst thou been an honest man!"

As she spoke, the elder child gave his toy a sharp push, which set it rolling swiftly. Sigmund smothered a curse, for the thing rolled straight toward the porch where they lay hid; and after it raced the two lads. shouting gaily in their shrill young voices.

Sigmund, poised on hands and toes, would have slipped out of sight; but Sinfiotli incautiously raised his head higher to see how close the toy would come. Even as his helmet rose above the cask, the bauble went tinkling past him, and down the steps; and the older boy, following, caught sight of the steel crest gleaming in the torchlight. He stepped forward a little to see the better, and was suddenly aware of two huge men, grim of face, full-armed. With a scream the child ran to his father, the younger following after, in uncomprehending fear.

"There are men outside, with weapons!" the child cried; and Siggeir leaped to his feet. Swiftly he snatched a horn from the wall behind him, and blew a frantic blast.

Straightway Sigmund and Sinfiotli sprang through the door, shields up and swords out; but Sigmund tripped and fell sprawling over the threshold, and his son paused to raise him up. Ere they could reach the king, a flood of house-carls raced down from the loft and burst into the hall, with a tremendous clanking of steel.

"Back to back!" Sigmund shouted; and the two confronted their foes, hopeless of vengeance now, but set on selling their lives dearly. As the house-carls rushed them, a dozen others—the guard, summoned from the kitchens by the shouting and clangor—poured in from the porch.

The two Volsungs struck out manfully, fighting more to make a good end than to win; and wheresoever their blades fell, a man went down. But they were outnumbered thirty to one, with ever fresh forces pouring in to aid their foes. Signy sat in an agony of fear for her kinsmen, while the struggling house-carls knocked against her in their efforts to close.

Sinfiotli, joying in the give and take of fight, made his blade play like the hammer of Thor. His young face was aflame, his mighty arms seemed never to tire. His father, as strong, but older, spared his strength with cunning, dealing more thrusts than cuts, and slashing from the wrist. Twelve good men they slew before the sheer weight of their foes swept them from their feet, and they were overwhelmed by the surge of many men piling upon them. When the heap once more separated itself and rose from off them, they were disarmed and bound.

Signy still sat at her bench—the only seat in the hall left unbroken by the savage struggle; and her eyes were bitter. But Siggeir came forth from the bower where he had hidden, a grin of triumph on his still pale face. His legs still trembled under him as he made his uncertain way to his enemies, and gazed upon them with mockery mixed with amazement.

"The one," he said slowly, striving to control the fear in his voice, "the one has the face of Volsung, only bleaker; the other is like Sigmund in his youth. But Sigmund must be old now—ha!

"Thou art Sigmund!" he cried, pointing at his life-long foe. "Age cannot hide thee from me. The gods have dealt unkindly with thee as with me, Son of Volsung; little joy hast thou had in life. Ay, and less joy shalt thou have in death!"

Turning to Sinfiotli, he stared at the young man with wonder on his face. "Thou shouldst be his son, for thou hast the look of him as he once was. And yet—there is something about thee that I seem to know. Who art thou?"

"Sigmund's son, and thy worst hater!" Sinfiotli snarled at him. "Now are the last of Volsung's race, in thy hands, thou false coward; but though thou doom us to fire or rope, we shall yet win free, and slay thee!"

Long Siggeir laughed at him, with the wheezing laugh of age.

"Such a death have I in mind for you twain," he chuckled, "as even a Volsung cannot escape. Ho, Lofmund! Bid the carls dig a pit, deep and steep of side, with such covering as I shall show you how to make!"

All through the night the condemned men heard the clinking of mattocks and shovels; and at dawn they were led to their living grave. Siggeir had caused to be dug a pit ten feet deep, with sides shelving out at the bottom; and into this they were thrust, their bands unbound that they might attempt the hopeless task of escape, and so suffer the more.

Then Siggeir's house-carls covered them over with a roof of beams thatched with straw; and upon this he had earth heaped high. They were buried alive, in a grave-mound of the sort fashioned for dead heroes; nor was this the worst of their torments. The roof was so contrived that a single narrow shaft, faced with square stones bedded in earth, let in the air and light of day far above them.

The captives sat in their gloomy prison; and after a while Sigmund said to his son:

"I warned thee to be wary, but thou didst not heed; and from thy rashness comes death to us both. Death, without that vengeance for which I have lived through lonely years and bitter griefs—in vain!"

The shaft above them darkened, and a thin laugh grated on their ears.

"Death!" the voice of Siggeir echoed. "Ay, such a death! There is air enough to keep you alive, while hunger wastes those mighty limbs, and the fires of thirst eat slowly, slowly at your throats. Ye have plotted, and lurked, and dared—in vain, in vain! I live, and the kin of Volsung dies—dies forever!" He withdrew, leaving them to their despair.

The scant light that thrust down to them left the face of each but a white blur to the other's eyes; their voices seemed muffled by the damp earth walls. Long they sat silent; then, suddenly, Sinfiotli spoke—

"A vile death for a warrior!"

Sigmund's ears were quick to catch the tiny quaver in his son's voice—the first he had ever heard there. A grim smile twitched on his lips.

"Now," he answered, "thou hast learned at last the need of caution. A pity thou hadst not known it a day sooner. Yet the fault is mine. I loved thee because thou didst never know fear; but now I know that a little fear is a good thing in a man, for it makes him prudent. Be of good heart, my son; if we may escape this pit, our chance of slaying our foe is better than ever before."

"There is no escape," muttered Sinfiotli.

"Who knows? My sister yet lives, and loves me; and now that Siggeir is sure of our helplessness, he will relax his guard. Why, think you, did he keep men at the gate, and so strong a company of house-carls ever about him, when there was neither war nor chance of war against him?

"Why, when to maintain so great a force costs much gold—and Siggeir holds his gold well nigh as dear as his blood? Because he feared me. Ay, though he thought me dead, he feared me—because he did not *know* me dead. But now he regards us both as dead indeed, or dying; and he will watch no more."

"Much good we get of that!" the young man answered hopelessly. "We must lie here, weaker and weaker with each passing hour, the moisture drying in our throats, our tongues swelling—till we die of feebleness, or go mad with thirst. By all the gods! Could I but lay my fingers about that evil dotard's neck!"

"Keep that thought uppermost in thy mind," Sigmund said, "and we shall yet win. Thou canst count on Signy. Once before she saved my life, when Siggeir deemed me as good as dead; and it will be easier for her now that he is reckless with confidence!"

Sinfiotli was not cheered. For hours he sat sullen and silent; nor could Sigmund rouse him. The patch of blue sky above them grew dull before he spoke again; but at last he leaped to his feet.

"Let us not bide our death like dogs!" he cried. "Let me stand on thy shoulders, my father, so that I may work at yonder hole in the roof!"

"So thou hast thought of that," Sigmund laughed. "Be sure Siggeir thought of it too, and guarded against it. Nevertheless I will help thee try!"

Supported on the older man's shoulders, Sinfiotli groped with his fingers at the stone-faced shaft. He could scarce see at all, for daylight was dying fast. He was very thirsty. Impatiently he fumbled for the chinks between the stones, prying at them with all his strength. His nails broke, his fingers were gashed and bleeding; yet no single stone was the looser for all his toil. So tight did the squared stones press the earth between them that his finger-tips would not enter.

On and on he worked, little heeding the pain, his thoughts all on freedom, revenge, and—water. Most of all he craved water, to ease the burning in his throat. His breath came whistling through his mouth, forced open by the hard toil; and all his fruitless labor brought him only greater thirst. In despair he thrust his arm up the shaft, to learn its depth. What he found finished his courage and his hope.

"Let me down!" he gasped. "Here we must die!"

CHAPTER IX

THE SWORD RETURNS

HE WAS no sooner down than something fell after him, striking his shoulder. He looked up; but all was black overhead. Night had come while he labored. It was Sigmund whose searching hands found what had fallen.

"This is Signy's work!" he muttered. "Stand back—there may be more to follow!"

There was. Some weighty thing fell with a thud between the desperate men; and once more Sigmund seized it. But it was the lighter object that he examined first.

"Here is food and drink!" he cried.

Sinfiotli sprawled over him in his haste to drink. Sigmund, casting aside the cloths that wrapped the bundle, handed him a small flask and a packet of cold meat. Sinfiotli drank with eager gulps, spilling a little in his lust for the cooling water; but his father neither ate nor drank till he had opened the heavier packet. At the touch of it he gasped.

"A sword!" he exulted. "Ay—that same matchless sword that I tore from the Branstock, long ago! I can tell it by the feel of the hilt. Siggeir must indeed deem us helpless, if Signy could beguile that from him!"

Calmness returning, he ate, and drank so much of the water as his son had left. Having finished—

"Now," he said, "to work! Give me thy shoulder this time!"

Sinfiotli made no delay; he was too eager for deliverance from the ghastly death that threatened them. Standing on his shoulders, Sigmund supported himself with one hand against the edge of the shaft, while with the sword in his other hand he dug, steadily and with utmost care.

The good steel bit deep into the earth between the stones, which no fingers could penetrate; and soon he felt the lowest stone settle. Those above held fast, gripped by the pressure of the earth about them. Wrenching at the loosened stone, he pulled it free, dropped it clear of his son, and worked at the next. Now and again the sword struck stone, but the fine blade did not break.

THE work went on slowly, but ceaselessly. Ever and again Sigmund would descend to let his son rest; but he would never allow the impatient youth to take his place, nor let the precious sword leave his own hands.

It was his again; with it his youth seemed to return to him. Hope and confidence were his once more, with the noble weapon which he believed Odin had given him. With it luck had passed from Siggeir's hand to his.

The night was far spent when, the stone facing removed block by block, a rush of dirt through the shaft spattered and blinded both men. Winking the earth from his eyes, Sigmund attacked the lighter part of his task, with a warning to his son:

"Head down, lad! When I speak, let me down, and hug the side of the pit!"

He slashed mightily at the earthen shaft, wider now; and ever-increasing runlets of dirt trickled over his shoulders. Suddenly he leaped down, with a cry of warning, a small landslide following him. Now, having worked out all the filling between two of the roof-beams, he once more climbed to Sinfiotli's shoulders. Feeling the heavy wood with his finger-tips—for he could barely reach it—he knew that freedom lay close at hand.

"Up—on tiptoe!" he commanded. With a grunt of effort Sinfiotli obeyed. As he heaved up, Sigmund left his shoulders with a leap, and caught at the roof-beams which he could not see.

Well had his cunning fingers marked their position; he caught them fairly, and drew himself up by sheer strength. An effort that tried his shoulder-muscles, a brace of kicks at the sliding face of the shaft, and he was up—free, in the clean air of night.

He glanced around; no one was near. Siggeir had indeed relaxed his vigilance of thirty years. Swiftly Sigmund bent to the two exposed roof-beams, and with all his might wrestled to tear them free of the heaped earth that covered all but that little of their length above the shaft. In vain. The weight upon them was too great. How was he to get his son out?

Sinfiotli solved that riddle. His words barely carrying to his father's ears, the young man bade him stand aside, and tossed up the sword through the hole. With it, Sigmund fell to work to clear the beams, and at last had one free. Up-ending it, he thrust it down into the pit. Bracing the lower end against the earthen wall, Sinfiotli climbed up, Sigmund helping him as he struggled to the top.

"Free!" the father exulted. "And I have my sword, the gift of All-Father Odin!"

"I am weaponless," Sinfitoli muttered.

"Bide here, till I fetch thee a blade!" And Sigmund set off in the night.

He made straight for the palisade, recking but little of such guards as might be posted, sure that he would find few or none. Had not Siggeir, in his new confidence, been heedless enough to let the famous sword out of his keeping? Would he not, then, be heedless in other things also?

Sigmund was right. Two men only held the gate; nor did they hold it long. Having listened to their talk, and learned how few they were, he ran along the stockade till he was out of their hearing, and scaled it swiftly.

Crawling upon them from behind, he slew them with two strokes so close together that one had scarcely seen the other's head leap from his shoulders than he too was dead. Snatching up the sword of one, Sigmund ran back where his son waited.

Once armed, Sinfiotli felt all his hope and courage revive; but there was no more recklessness in him. He plucked at his father's arm.

"Lead on!" he urged. "This time I will not fail thee. I have learned fear, and with it wisdom!"

THEY made swift progress toward the gate, entered without resistance, and encountered no man till they reached the hall. Once more the door was open, as on the night before. Two more guards were there; but these slept at their posts. Not only the king, but all his folk had felt the fear of a generation roll from them when, as they thought, Sigmund lay helpless, waiting a sure death, beneath the earth.

Slaying the guards, they dragged the bodies aside, and hastened round the building to the rear of the bower, where they waited for dawn. It was soon upon them, for their escape had taken most of the night.

As soon as he could see well, Sigmund took from his pouch a bundle of birch bark, dry and ragged; and striking flint on steel, he caught the precious sparks and blew them in the heart of the papery wood. When the bark was blazing, he laid it in a chink of the pine wall, where the moss had fallen out. Then they stood watching, till the flame had caught well.

Running to the outside stair that led down from the loft, they set its planks alight, so that there might be no escape for any within save through the main hall door. Thither they hurried again, and took their stand one on each side of the entrance.

"When they come," Sigmund ordered, "strike fast and hard!"

In ten minutes the tinder-dry building was aroar with flames on rear and side. The crackling and the smoke—blown by the wind through every chink—woke those within. Shouts of alarm rang out; running feet pounded in the loft, and scant-clad figures dashed into the hall to learn their peril. At sight of those grim figures at the door, the frightened house-carls howled in fury.

The bower-door burst open, giving vent to a stream of wailing folk. First of all ran Siggeir, moaning and wringing his hands. When he beheld the face of Sigmund grinning at him through the smoke-wreaths, he shrieked aloud in terror. Foam flecked his lips; he fell on his knees, entreating pity.

Close on his heels rushed Valrun, with the king's two sons. She was pale, but her eyes gleamed. The children screamed, and tearing away their hands from her clasp, fled for the door. Sinfiotli thrust them roughly back.

Last of all, scorning to run, the queen

came from the blazing bower with stately dignity. One glance she gave to her abject husband; and her lips curled as she turned her back on him. Her children flung themselves upon her, wailing and clutching at her skirts.

"Get from me, ye cowards!" she cried, and snatched her gown from them. "Ye betrayed my brother to his foes!"

Thus far the house-carls, restrained by discipline, had waited for orders from their king; but seeing him broken and terrified, they were on the point of bolting to save their own lives. Ulfgeir threw himself before them, armed with an ax.

"In column—two by two!" he cried. "Ho, Asbiorn and Asleif! Raise the king, and help him hence! We will cut a way through for him!"

Valrun flung herself on her brother's breast.

"If thou save this worthless nidering," she screamed, "thou shalt never see my face again!"

He strove to put her aside, but she clung to him. Torn between his loyalty and his love for her, the unhappy officer stood for one moment, the restless house-carls fast forgetting his orders in their fear for themselves. They wavered, broke, and rushed in a mass for the door. Nor did they take the wretched king with them.

Blinded and choked by smoke, scorched by the tongues of fire that licked in at the windows and curled round the logs of the wall, they were in no mood for steadiness. They poured in a torrent toward the one way out, where the two avengers waited with drawn swords. Unarmored—their mail left behind in their flight from the loft—armed with such weapons as they could snatch from the hot walls, the carls charged in blind panic.

In their frenzy they heeded not the narrowness of the doorway; by their very mass as their flanks smashed against the doorposts, they piled up in a crushed and broken heap. Into that heap licked the blades of Sigmund and Sinfiotli, making red work in the glow of the onsurging flame.

That narrow door, made to stand siege, would have enabled the two to beat off many times their number, even had both sides been matched in weapons; but now, their swords ripping through unarmored sides, the Volsungs cut the milling mass to pieces, and drove it back, shattered.

Those who survived re-formed, and came on again; fewer now, but more deadly, having learned their lesson. Their weight would have borne the avengers back, had not Sigmund, with a swift shout to his son, let them through and leapt to one side. As they poured past, the two terrible assailants closed in, smiting them down from behind. Some turned to resist, and fell swiftly; the greater part, overcome with fear, fled as fast as they could through the gate of the stockade.

The whole back of the hall was now aflame, fire and smoke rolling forward to engulf the building. The two Volsungs, farthest from its onrush, still held their post untroubled. Siggeir, scarce able to stand, but driven on by fear of death, tottered toward the entrance in Ulfgeir's arms, while Valrun plucked fiercely at her brother's hands.

"Come out!" called Sigmund. "All shall live, save Siggeir alone!"

Siggeir thrust out both his hands. "Spare me!" he moaned, his bearded chin trembling, his smoke-red eyes dropping tears. "Spare me, Sigmund! I will heap you with gold; half the kingdom will I give——"

Sigmund laughed bitterly. "Wilt thou give back my father and my brothers?" he mocked. "Naught will I take at thy hands, save thy life! I have grown old hating thee, thou murderer and coward; now vengeance is in my hands. Thou shalt die—not by sword, but by fire! And the House of Volsung shall live!"

ULFGEIR, ever faithful, heaved up his ax to cleave a way for his master. Valrun would have stopped him, but he flung her to the floor. Sigmund's sword flashed, and the ax-head dropped, cut away from its helve. With a cry of despair the brave officer drew his knife, and plunged it into his own breast.

Shrieking, Valrun flung herself upon him, his blood reddening her robe. Signy bent above them, striving to drag her maid away.

"Come out, Signy!" cried Sigmund, "thy sons with thee!" Signy came, but she paused not for the two boys. They followed, snatching at her, and crying piteously. After them staggered Siggeir, weeping. The flames raced toward them as they ran; with a roar and a fearful insuck of hot air and smoke, the roof fell in behind them.

Overcome with fright, the king screamed aloud, and rushed on the swords of his foes. Sigmund met him with raised point; but such was the Goth's fear of the flames that he gripped the steel till his hand was cut to the bone. When Sigmund hurled him back, the old man's fingers were almost severed.

Signy brushed past him, beating at her scorched gown. The children followed her to the porch. She turned, and pointed a scornful finger at them.

"Shall the little snakes outlive the old viper?" she cried. "Slay them, lest I be called Mother of Cowards!"

And Sinfiotli, seizing one in each hand, flung the boys far into the seething fire.

Out into the court the three retreated from the fearful heat, leaving Siggeir crouched by the threshold. Signy caught her brother's hand in hers.

"Well hast thou avenged our father, Sigmund!" she cried; and her eyes were bright and fierce. "Verily I love thee now more than ever before; and, save for one other, none have I loved but thee these many years!"

She kissed him; and the little flames ran toward her along the planks of the porch. She glanced back over her shoulder, and saw Valrun. The maid still knelt above her brother, but her face was turned toward Sigmund and his son. There was a glad, proud look in her eyes, even while the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"The walls will topple soon," said Signy. "This is the end."

"Bid Valrun come forth!" Sigmund urged. "Stay—I will go for her!"

Signy drew him back. "Nay; it is her wish to die. She has had all that life can give."

He sprang past her. Valrun rose as if to meet him, her face transfigured; but as he crossed the threshold, she drove her brother's knife into her breast and fell lifeless above Ulfgeir's corpse. Groaning, Sigmund went back.

As he reached his son and sister, the walls bulged; and Sinfiotli caught the woman about the waist.

"Back, mother!" he cried. "The porch will fall this way!"

Sigmund turned on his son, staring.

"'Mother'?" he echoed. "Meanest thou——"

Signy flung her arms round the young man's neck. "Nay!" she denied. "He knows not. Yonder lies thy mother, child!" She pointed to the bleeding form of Valrun, almost surrounded by the the raging flame.

"It was Valrun who came to thee in the forest, Sigmund. She loved thee, and for that reason would not stay with thee, lest love of her should make thee forget thy vengeance. Ah, cunningly we contrived it! Knowing that I bore only cowards, I sent her to thee. When her time came, we wrought so prudently that Siggeir believed us when we said the child was mine. He was brought up as my son, that he might be stirred to greater hatred of Siggeir by my wrongs and thine.

"This we did that thou mightest have a worthy comrade, and our kindred be avenged. Now let me go, for I must die with my husband. I have hated him all my life; but I am his wife, and it is fitting I should perish with him!"

Sinfiotli held her close, and Sigmund pleaded with her. But at that moment Siggeir rose from the burning threshold, and—his clothing ablaze—rushed out into the garth.

The madness of fear lent him strength; ere any could stop him, he was half-way to the gate. Sigmund snatched at him as he flew by, but too late. Whirling, Sinfiotli loosed Signy's arms, and caught the Goth by his flapping robes. Bearing him back to the porch, he heaved the old king up and hurled him far into the blazing hall.

Sigmund cried out suddenly, a terrible cry of rage and grief. Signy had sped past them, and run back into the doomed building.

"Farewell, brother and nephew!" she called.

Father and son drew back from the heat, slowly, their eyes wet with tears that were not all of the smoke. Long they stood by the gate, the posts of which were already smoldering.

At last Sigmund raised his bloody sword on high.

"I prayed to thee for vengence, Father Odin!" he cried with shaking voice. "Behold, thou hast given it me, taking wife and sister for thy price! A bitter god art thou!"

Sinfiotli looked on him, and then at the embers which were the grave of all that they both held dear.

"An evil thing," he muttered, "an evil thing is vengeance!"

The Camp-Fire

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

YOU will remember that at a recent Camp-Fire Talbot Mundy told us his conception of Julius Cæsar—his reasons for portraying Cæsar as he does in his stories of *Tros* of Samothrace. I upbraided myself for having meekly accepted the usual estimate of Cæsar without ever having considered how much of that usual estimate is based on Caæsar's own estimate of himself in his "Commentaries," without ever having carefully studied the other authorities and data on which that estimate is based and without ever having tried to reason out a conclusion of my own from whatever data I did possess.

In a word, I was disgusted with myself for having been a sheep. Whether Cæsar's character was this or that is of no great moment to me, but this instance of my having accepted anybody's opinion on anything without at least attempting to do some research and reasoning of my own *was* of moment to me. Like most other people, I far too often do accept opinions without thinking for myself, but I am ashamed of it and when in this particular case Mr. Mundy suddenly presented to me a different estimate, arrived at by independent thinking, it was not only a challenge but an accusation and I plead guilty and expressed regret.

My plea was for an open mind and independent thinking. I endorsed very strongly Mr. Mundy's open-mindedness and independence, but I stated definitely and specifically that I did not swallow his theory whole and that it might be wrong in whole or part. To me the important point was not the correctness or incorrectness of his theory, but the fact that, right or wrong, he had refused to accept anything not proven to the satisfaction of his own reasoning power but had got hold of available sources and formed his own opinion, whereas I—like most of the rest of you—hadn't done any thinking myself but, without questioning, just accepted the usual estimate *without being really able to back-up that estimate.* I have much more respect for Mr. Mundy even if his theory is all wrong than I have for myself who merely swallowed what some one else handed me even if it happened to be right—or for you if you swallowed it with an equal lack of independent thinking.

Having swallowed the usual estimate without thinking and being ashamed of having done so, I declined either to swallow or to reject Mr. Mundy's estimate without thinking and I dragged out the old estimate and said—

"Here, maybe you're right and maybe you're wrong, but from now on I neither swallow or reject you until I've really examined the case and have gathered sufficient evidence with which to form—and support—an opinion of my own. If people who have really studied the case endorse you that is evidence that must be seriously considered, but it does not in itself constitute proof that you are true unless the evidence can be shown conclusive in itself."

I and my mental processes are not very important, but the letters from some of you make it necessary to state my case clearly and in detail. The question of Cæsar's character, though interesting, is not of vital importance. But the insight into the American mind and character that this case has afforded is very decidedly of vital importance.

For see what happened. Letters began coming in. Some of them were from men who, like Mr. Mundy, had dug into the facts and records, done independent thinking and arrived at conclusions of *their own.* Most of them disagreed with him, but, whether they did or not, they and their opinions are entitled to respect. But others came from men who had read much, swallowed much and thought little. Their opinions are entitled to very little respect, for their opinions are not really their own. And others were from men who had read only a little, swallowed most of it and thought none at all. Their opinions are entitled to no respect whatever, any more than was my own swallowing of what little I had read.

I had asked two or three I knew were familiar with Roman history to give Camp-Fire their views, knowing they were pretty certain to take up the case against Mr. Mundy and thus ensure a full discussion. But it is the spontaneous letters that are most significant as index to American thought habits. Entirely aside from the question of whether Cæsar was or wasn't which, they are depressing. I haven't lived all these years without learning that mankind is generally illogical or at least unlogical and that it tends to cling blindly to established opinion whether right or wrong. But these letters somehow brought it home with a sickening jolt.

There was actual resentment, bitter, hostile resentment that any one should dare take a new view of Julius Cæsar! You'd think he were a national issue. These hostile ones didn't prove the new view was wrong, except by quoting other people's opinions. It was new, therefore of course it was wrong. One of them was so shaken to his foundations that he wrote me anonymously to say he'd read and liked the magazine for years but after this attack on Julius Cæsar he was through with it forever Yes, and that's as far as he got toward any proof or reasoning—the other fellow differed from him and therefore was not only mistaken but criminal.

These are the material from which are builded our bigots and fanatics, and our ultra-conservatives who fight against all progress because all progress is a going from old things to new. Here we have the intolerance that is one of our national curses. Here—oh, well, let's look at the letters. But in parting I'd like to remark that if those who completely failed to comprehend my attitude haven't read their historical references and authorities with any more exactness and understanding than they read my statements in the February 10 "Camp-Fire" their conclusions and deductions from the former are likely to be equally baseless and erroneous.

Here is one from Elmer Davis, formerly of our staff, for some years one of the editors of the New York *Times* and author of various books of fiction. For a long time the history of the Romans and Greeks has held particular interest for him, he has read widely and is in the habit of digesting what he reads. I am compelled, however, to question his digestion of "the editor's amplifications" in this case. Said amplifications were either queries only or as stated above—an insistence on open-mindedness and a refusal to accept any theory on Cæsar without satisfactory proof.

New York City.

I think Mundy is a Grade A certified fiction writer but as an historical philosopher I think he is punk, nor do I think what he said about Rome and Cæsar justified the editor's amplifications in the February 10th "Camp-Fire." Mundy is in good company, of course, in knocking the Roman Empire. Lots of people disapprove of it. H. G. Wells disapproves of it because it wasn't Socialist and I take it Mundy disapproves because it wasn't Theosophist. Anyhow, here is the way it seems to me:

IN GENERAL, and for these times, I am as hearty an anti-imperialist as anybody. But the Roman Empire was a long time ago and things were different. Certainly the Romans conquered and looted and enslaved. So did everybody, in those days; the Romans simply happened to be better at it than anybody else. *But*, when they had conquered and enslaved, when the first excitement was over, they began trying not only to govern their subjects decently but to let them in on the management of the Roman Empire. And, in time, they gave a better government than our half of the world had ever seen before, and to more people. In its way, self-government. From Vespasian on, for the next four centuries till the Western Empire ended, the Emperors (and their generals and ministers too) came from Spain, from Africa, from the Balkans, from Syria, from Gaul and Britain. Very rarely from Rome. A career was open to talent; any man who was good could go to the top. A hundred years after Cæsar died probably a fourth of the inhabitants of the Empire were citizens with full privileges or the families of citizens; after Caracalla (around 215 A.D.) they were all citizens.

Rome tried, and succeeded, in the job of giving good government, as other great empires of antiquity did not. Persia made a half-hearted attempt with some slight success under Darius, and then slumped. The kingdoms that followed Alexander did better, as a rule, than the tribes and city states they superseded. But Rome first did the job on a big scale. Certainly Rome was not perfect; civil wars, arising chiefly from a constitutional defect, finally so weakened the empire that it went to pieces, and the high overhead cost of government helped a good deal too. (That is a lesson Congress might profitably remember, if it had brains enough to remember anything.) But while it lasted Rome was better than anything the human race had had before it.

WHAT does Mundy prefer? His Gauls and Britons? I think he idealizes them as eighteenth-century philosophers used to idealize the noble savage. Quite permissible, for a fiction writer; but don't call it history. Certainly those noble Germanic ancestors of ours who upset Rome were nothing to be proud of. They were a lot of tough gorillas who knew how to fight; and that is all they knew. They conquered and looted and enslaved just as the Romans had done five hundred years before; and that was all they did, all they did for centuries, till they had intermarried with their subjects and the blended population began to recover a little of the old culture. They wanted land and slaves so that they could live high without work on the loot of a palace they didn't have brains enough to build or even to live in. That was as far as they got.

If Mundy thinks so much of the Gauls, call in the Gauls as a witness against him. A hundred and twenty years after Cæsar's time, in 70 A.D., the whole Empire was upset by a series of civil wars and the Army of the Rhine went to Italy to support one of the claimants to the throne. Thereupon some of the commanders of native regiments (Germans) who had been left behind got up a rebellion and a few Gauls joined them. They got all worked up and proclaimed the Empire of Gaul; Hurrah for liberty, equality and fraternity, free beer and no taxes; take off your coats, boys (or togas rather) and come out to dance in the light of the moon. Thereupon there was held at Rheims a sort of national convention of all Gaul. A hundred and twenty years after the conquest; they had had that much experience of Rome. Many of these men, pure Gauls in blood, were by that time Roman Senators and all of them must have been citizens. They talked it over and decided that, having tried both, they preferred Rome to Gaul.

THESE particular men, of course, hadn't tried both; liberty was back in the days of their great-grandfathers. But they knew their history; they knew that the Roman army alone kept the Germans out of Gaul; and even those who wanted to secede were entangled instantly in a whole string of insoluble problems. What should be the constitution? Where the capital? Who would run the country? The Romans had been doing that and these delegates, the big men of Gaul, had sat in on it. They decided, quite sensibly, that there was nothing in secession. To be sure, they may have been influenced somewhat by the fact that the civil wars were over and a man named Petilius Cerialis was coming up from Rome with seven legions to see about this Empire of Gaul; but the fact remains that after a fair trial the Roman conquest had been ratified, if not by a plebiscite certainly by a constituent assembly. Two or three hundred years later Gaul was the backbone of the Empire.

All this is in the Histories of Tacitus, Book IV, chapters 54-69; and in chapters 73 and 74 you will find a speech of Cerialis to some of the rebels which pretty well sums up the argument for the Roman Empire.

THIS of course, was the Empire, a much more respectable affair than the Republic at least after it had turned imperialist. Mundy has some color for his argument in that Rome was at its worst, politically and morally and from the standpoint of administrative efficiency, in Cæsar's day. All the big politicians were pretty tough just then; they had to be to get anywhere. Cæsar was the best of the lot; the only one who could see ahead, could try to reform the terrible mess that the Roman Republic had become and make it work for the general good. His private morals, no doubt, were not those of a deacon in the church; but Suetonius, whom Mundy seems to follow, is a far less reliable authority in such matters than the *Illustrated Daily News*.

I DON'T know where Mundy gets his stuff about the Romans relentlessly stamping out the Mysteries, nor his belief that they were all interconnected and all theosophist. I don't think you'll find much of that in the profane historians, though his esoteric writers may have played it up. Cæsar was rough on the Druids of Gaul for the same reason that the English were rough on the Irish priests in the days of Elizabeth and Cromwell—because the national religion was the cente rof national resistance. Your opinion of that depends on whether you are pro-Irish and pro-Gaul.

As to the Mysteries in general, a reform wave in Rome a hundred and twenty years before Cæsar's time tried to suppress one form of orgiastic mystery religion, but Rome was young and simple then. Later on there was nothing the Romans ate up so eagerly as all forms of Oriental religion; the more mystery the better. The mahatmas and gurus, if they had ever got so far west, would have found ancient Rome as much of a gold mine as modern London and New York.

That's all, I guess.—Elmer Davis.

FROM Clements Heaton, dealing chiefly with the civilization of Gauls and Britons and affording an example of how accepted history is subject to enforced revision in the light of newly discovered facts and of more searching and independent investigation:

New York City.

In your number of February 10th I find the note in which you ask to hear from any historians in confirmation or rebuttal of Mr. Mundy's theories concerning Roman Government and practise.

NOW I happen to remember that Mr. Louis Courajod of Paris in his lessons at the Louvre emitted most distinct views concerning the action of the Romans in Gaul. He was for many years in the Ecole de Chartes in Paris, that is the official record office of France where they make it their business to write reliable information by getting at the original sources. So much so, that when Courajod was appointed lecturer at the Louvre, he created a small revolution by ideas which set things topsy-turvy in architectural criticism. Now in his published lectures (which can be seen at the New York Public Library) one finds he sternly condemns the Romans for their rascally treatment of Gaul. I do not recall the details, but he says in effect that by their ruthless exactions (through men who farmed the taxes and got all they could out of the people) they ruined the Gaulish noble families and when villages were depleted of men, the remaining inhabitants had to pay the same amount as before.

As this went on for centuries, the backbone of the people was broken and, when the Roman power fell to pieces, they were no longer able to withstand the Northerners, so the Franks and Burgundians came in and took the lead. This was disastrous, for everything under the Franks went overside, as Lavisse has shown in his great history. So, for about nine hundred years there was a steady sagging down till the depth of the dark ages was reached, when slowly an upward growth began, this time independent of Roman militarism and due to local initiative.

AS THE Gauls and the Britons were doubtless much the same, it is interesting to know they were efficient craftsmen and artists. They had a metal working city near Autun in central France which, when destroyed by the Romans, was left in undisturbed ruins and was investigated in the XIXth Century. This, with the wonderful Gaulish camp in the Côte d'Or, not far from Autun, which has been carefully searched by the Government and its many remains placed in the museum of St. Germain, enables us to get a pretty close idea of the Gaulish culture. It certainly was far more refined than usually supposed.

The Gaulish coins, of which some of each tribe have been found, show a distinct relationship with the Greek coins of Macedonia. There are other points in their history which show relationship with Greece, and in Switzerland, formerly part of Gaul known as Helvetia, objects of Greek origin have been found. One expert traces back the origin of the legend of the Holy Grail, so prevalent in Medieval epoch in Brittany, to the cauldron or Fer, the center of military life (like the camp kettle) which was representative on some of these coins and was also a Greek usage.

There is nothing surprizing, then, in a relationship between Samothracian or Pythogorean mysteries and Druid cults. If Greek art is derived from Egypt, as Professor Breasted affirms, there may be a relationship also with the very ancient Egyptian ideas.

But the Gauls lived in strongholds separated one from another by stretches of forests which dangerous wild bears and wolves infested. There was little or no political cohesion among them, and it was the work of the Romans to join up the country by building a network of fine roads, with military stations skillfully planned so that armed legions could be concentrated quickly in any part of the country which was then permanently held in subjection, to be systematically exploited. These roads were used all through the medieval epoch and now become automobile routes.—Clements Heaton.

ONE from Frank R. Whitzel. As to my "swallowing Mr. Mundy's theory whole," the comrade is respectfully referred to what I've said above on this point, or to pp. 178–180 of our February 10 "Camp-Fire," my original statements.

Miami, Florida.

Just a few remarks, since you invite them.

Theodore Roosevelt is dead, and an author may now slander him without risk, may call him a liar, lecherous, cruel, thieving, murderous, anything save drunken; that happens to have been disproved in court. But what would be your opinion of an author who accused Roosevelt of debauching the wives of all his closest political associates? Would you swallow it whole? Yet that is apparently what you have done in regard to Mr. Talbot Mundy's stories of Cæsar.

THE licentiousness of Cæsar is based upon stories circulated by his political enemies that he had violated the wives of Pompey, Crassus, Gabinius and others of his own party, his closest friends and supporters. Such calumnies were a common practise in Roman politics and no one paid them much attention at the time. Why, Cicero was accused of intimacy not only with his freedman, Tiro, but with his beloved daughter, Tullia. The men whom Cæsar was accused of dishonoring paid no heed whatever to the stories. Pompey married his daughter. Crassus guaranteed his debts. And Gabinius followed him with unshaken fidelity until his own death.

The same lies by the same people for the same reason were told of Cæsar's relations with the wife of King Bogud; yet that king remained to the end Cæsar's steadfast friend.

Only one other name is mentioned in connection with these stories, Cleopatra. It is very likely that Cæsar did form a liaison with Cleopatra in Alexandria. But historians say she was visiting him in Rome at the time of his murder and fled afterward. There is no basis for his yarn, not the slightest. On the contrary Suetonius says plainly that Cleopatra visited Rome during Cæsar's ascendency and that he *sent her home* laden with gifts. The story grew out of the fact that Cicero in his letters obscurely mentions *a* queen who was in Rome at the murder but he gives no name and there is no reason, save the petty desire to slander a great man, for assuming it to have been Cleopatra.

CÆSAR was probably little better, certainly no worse, than other Romans of his epoch, but of his gross licentiousness there is no evidence that a sensible man would consider for a moment. His history was written by his political enemies, members of the aristocracy who hated Cæsar first because he was the champion of the common people, the democrats; and second because he and his family were raised so far above themselves whom they considered his equal or superior in birth.

Is it fair for Mr. Mundy to accept what he finds in a classic writer that fits his own opinions and rejects what does not? That is called "working your evidence," and you can prove anything if you "cook your evidence."

Mr. Mundy is not the first to find out that Cæsar's Commentaries were written with an eye to their political effect. Yet they have stood the test of time and searching criticism as to their general accuracy. And we have some pretty fair evidence of their truth. To mention but one point: Cicero's brother, Quintus, was one of Cæsar's lieutenants. Now both Ciceros were bitter political opponents of Cæsar, and Marcus dipped his pen in vitriol to oppose the Dictator. Yet never before or after Cæsar's death does he question the truth of the Commentaries. On the contrary he speaks of them with strong praise.

I could easily refute the other slanders, that of cruelty for instance—it would be child's play. But no doubt Mr. Mundy's mind is fixed beyond reach of proof, so I will say no more, save that I for one will skip the *Tros* stories. And I am sorry, as Mr. Mundy has been my favorite of your writers.—FRANK R. WHITZEL.

A LETTER from James Hathaway. He may, as he says, be "a more or less half educated roughneck," but he thinks for himself, which is a lot more than most wholly educated people do for themselves. Some of his statements will cause some people to moan with horror at his blunt frankness and to froth with rage because they don't agree with them. How dare he think contrariwise from themselves? And, still more, how dare he express his opinions openly? He writes from Minnesota, which is part of the Land of the Free where free opinion and free speech are said to be corner-stones of our political structure, but that won't help him much if his opinions venture out of the usual ruts.

And may I in advance call to the attention of the hastily minded the fact that I am neither endorsing or attacking his opinions but merely listening to them?

Excelsior, Minnesota.

Am not a historian, just a more or less half educated roughneck who has knocked around the world for about forty years and who prefers to read history etc., to reading the latest snappy.

MY POINT is that I think Mundy is full of pink prunes; while he writes a good strong, readable yarn, he is crazy. He has dug up all the old stuff used to frighten the people and mulled it over till he has lost sight of bedrock facts.

The organic law of the Roman Republic is to my mind the best piece of political law or rule of government ever produced and as long as the Roman people continued to be a nation of small freeholders it was a very effective rule of government, but after Rome overcame Carthage and the various Greek city states, slave labor became so cheap and common, that free labor could not compete, wealth came into the hands of a few and the small freeholder was forced out, leaving the land in the hands of the rich. This has happened many times to many nations through recorded history and will happen again.

This was the situation in Julius Cæsar's time. This forced the freemen into the army. The Roman Legion was no more hard boiled than any other body of men would have been under the same conditions. I am an old soldier and I know.

THE oldest military command in the world is "Breed before you die," hence our 48 hours to get married in the last war. Through all history the women have been part of the spoils of war. Witness the records of some of the European armies in the last war. And the women haven't minded so much as long as they were treated half-way decent. To Cæsar and his men the women of Gaul and Germany were just good looking savages to be treated as such, much as the early white men used Indian women in this country.

Any body of men such as the Roman legion has to have action and plenty of it, but their wants would be the same then as now. In the last war a soldier on leave from the front wanted first a drink, then a square meal, then a good looking blonde and another drink. When he got back to the front, he got ——, so he had his fun while he could. The Roman legioner took these things as his share of the loot. We bought and paid for them. Not much difference.

As for Julius Cæsar I know men of his type today. Brilliant, successful business men of the small, wiry, alert type, dissipated as ——, woman-chasers, who yet give the world far more than they take.

As for Rome not keeping faith. What nation does? Did we, with all our pride, in our word keep faith with the Indian? We did not, and to the old Roman the Gaul and Britain were much like our Indians to us.

Cæsar's problem was to conquer and hold the land from the Rhine to the Roman line against the land hunger of the Germanic tribes. If he could destroy a whole tribe at once, his problem was just so much easier. Modern people have done the same.

To sum up, Rome gave the world far more than she took—law, good roads, respect for authority and the value of citizenship. We got these from her and these are worth a thousand of Mundy's stories, however brilliantly he may tell them.

To quote Virgil:

"Others belike with happier grace
From bronze or stone shall call the face
Plead doubtful causes, map the skies
And tell when planets set or rise,
But Roman, thou—do thou control
The nations wide and far.
Be this thy genius, to impose
The rule of peace on vanished foes,
Show pity to the humble soul
And crush the sons of Pride.

The old Romans were cruel and hard, many times faithless, but their respect for law and authority gave them the world.—JAMES HATHAWAY.

AT OUR next Camp-Fire we'll hear more opinions on C. J. Cæsar, deceased.

CONCERNING his novelette in the May 30th issue something from William Byron Mowery. At this writing the fate of the Texas Rangers is in doubt, but it is to be hoped that an organization with so splendid a record will be carried on to further usefulness.

Austin, Texas.

Re "Hard Lines," a couple words. It is based upon the incessant trouble experienced by both the American troopers and the Mounted with Indians jumping back and forth across the Border. The character of *Inspector Raymond* may be a source of objection, inasmuch as readers do not usually associate his like with the Mounted. If I had made him a typical officer, the objection would be condemning. I've taken pains to imply he decidedly was not. The Mounted, it seems to me, had and has less wire-pulling, etc., than any similar organization I know of, unless it be the Texas Rangers. However, it has had its *Inspector Raymonds*, just as the Rangers have been imbroiled in political and labor disputes not typical of their usual activity.

A minor point: the treaty payments may not have been made in American money at the time of this story. I'm simply unable to find out the fact of the matter. They were so made seven or eight years later for certain. The question is not very vital.—WM. BYRON MOWERY.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom of many years, Erle D. Hosmer rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine, taking his place as a member of our writers' brigade.

Utilla, Bay Islands,
via La Ceiba, S. Honduras.

Greetings to the Camp-Fire Circle: Born in the last decade of the nineteenth century, in a small town founded by my maternal grandfather and named after my mother, in the State of Kansas.

AS A small boy took several long trips throughout the Middlewest with a cattle-buying uncle and other relatives and acquired a taste for rambling. Sent to Central America on a visit at the age of eleven and became incurably infected with Tropicalitis.

When twelve years old was sent from New York to Florida to go to a military school; saw the inside of the school once, entering through a basement window to get to the gym and swimming pool.

Returned to the family home in Tennessee when the funds got low and went to school for a while but was never happy. The walls of a schoolroom always seemed to me to be entirely too constricted. Had a disagreement with a teacher and was started off to the Tenn. Military Institute. Went to St. Louis and took in the Fair. With three others "hoboed" back (three weeks on the trip which was somewhat educational) and then departed to Central America again.

SET foot in the "Lands of Romance and Glamor along the Spanish Main" on Xmas day, 1905. Started out on the career of a "Soldier of Fortune" but failed wofully and became a T. T. T. instead. Got well informed about the Canal by walking it, from Culebra to Colon, toting a straw grip on the end of a stick over my shoulder. That was another educational trip.

In time became a "Banana Herder" and have followed that noble profession with more or less success ever since. Rejected for service in the war (weighed ninety-nine lbs. at physical examination, due to a combination of malaria, dysentery, neuralgia, and a few other kinds of "algias" and "itises"), but got a small excitement out of it by participating in a private war on Germans and pro-Germans down this way.

Went home after seventeen years of rambling and gathering experience, sporting a mustache, a coat of tan, a few lines in my face and a sour expression, and taking with me a small boy to present to my folks as the fruits of my years. Returned South after six weeks of snappy weather, and that's about all.

HAVE hung around in the flickering shadows of the Camp-Fire glow for a long time, listening to the talk and a-honin' to edge up and sit in the circle but never quite able to overcome my bashfulness until just now. Not overly afflicted with modesty—just bashful.

Well, I'm sure pleased to meet you-all, apologize for making you listen to my braying for so long, and will now sit down and give some one a chance to say something interesting. *Hasta otra ocasión,*—Erle D. Hosmer.

MANY of you are familiar in one form or another with the sagas upon which Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur has built his complete novelette in this issue. The following survey from him will be found interesting:

Berkeley, California.

I drew my material from the Volsunga Saga, of which the story forms the first part. This first part is much older than the rest of the saga: it probably goes back to the 4th century. It is one of the earliest and most genuinely Scandinavian of all legends that have come down to us. In working out the story, I discarded the supernatural element, which is strong in the original; inserted a few minor characters such as *Ulfgeir* and *Valrun;* toned down the more savage aspects of the legend; and furnished some of the machinery in which the sagas are as a rule deficient. But I have in no sense altered what seems to me to be the essential spirit of the original; the story is truly representative of the point of view and the manner of life of the Northern peoples at the time. I have, however, made *Valrun*, instead of Signy, the mother of Sinfiotli.

Precise dates and places are hard to establish for any really old legend; for the sagas and poems in which the legends are incorporated are much later than the historic events reflected in the legends. Thus the date for the events of this story can't be given with any greater precision than some time between 200 and 500 A. D., probably in the third century.

AT THAT time the Northern peoples had not so completely coalesced into settled kingdoms as they did later. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden were still divided into petty kingdoms acknowledging no common overlord. As for Frakkland: there are two theories as to its identity. The older and still more generally held is that it is the territory occupied by the Franks on the lower Rhine. That theory doesn't fit in with the details of the legend of Sigmund at all, though it does square perfectly with the later parts of the Volsungasaga, which deal with the exploits of Sigurd (the German Sigfried), reputed to be the third son of Sigmund. The fact is that the legend of Sigmund is purely Norse, and its setting must be Norse too; while the German legend of Sigfried, which must be localized in Frankish Germany, was tacked on to the Sigmund legend later (probably in the 12th century), to give it greater popularity. The latest and soundest theory as to Frakkland is that proposed by the Swedish scholar Ture Hederström. He places it in Sweden, in the province of Östergötland. His proof rests on a host of details, the most important being his discovery that there is still a district known as Frakksta in Östergötland, and that Frakksta district has several farms or villages, originally royal manors, which bear the name of Volsung (Valsing, Valsinge, Fruvalsinge, etc.). This evidence has been accepted as conclusive even by many of the adherents of the older theory.

IT IS plain, from the legend, that Sigmund's land must be one that would naturally come into rivalry and political contact with Gotland. Gotland is an island off the southeast coast of Sweden; It was the original home of the Goths. Östergötland is one of the eastern coast provinces of Sweden, within an easy sail, east by south, of Gotland. Add to this the discovery that a district of Östergötland is called Frakksta, and that this district still preserves the name of Volsung, and you have a good case. To clinch the matter, a king's burial mound containing richly adorned weapons has been found in one of these places bearing the name of *Valsinge.* Thus the whole action of my story takes place in what is now the southeastern part of Sweden.

The belief that Frakkland was Franconia in Germany doubtless owes its existence to the fact that Norwegian and Icelandic writers of the 12th and 13th centuries thought Frakkland meant "land of the Franks," and to the erroneous attachment of the legend of Sigfried to that of Sigmund—an attachment made even in Scandinavia.

SIGMUND'S home was thus one of the many little kingdoms existing in Scandinavia at the time of the great Teutonic migrations. Gotland was the most important and richest of these petty kingdoms, owing to its advantageous position. Being an island, it was protected by a stormy sea, and at the same time got the trade from Germany, Gaul, Denmark, Esthonia, and Russia. Through Russia, by the overland trail to Greece, it got the cream of the Mediterranean trade with the North, the North swapping furs and amber with Greece and Rome in exchange for jewels, gold and finely worked utensils. Frakkland would naturally have trade, and sometimes war, with Gotland. It is inconceivable that Franks in Germany should have worked so far back to the northeast as to get into political relations with Gotland. Frankish traders would certainly touch there, but there is no record of hostile contact, or of political relations, between Frank and Goth, except as Franks fought with Goths for Spain and Southern France at a date very much later than that of the story.—Arthur G. Brodeur.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue, Alex. McLaren writes that the grindstone incident is history. Silver Reef, Nevada, was the camp. I do not publish his letter because in stating the case to me it necessarily told too much of the story's plot in advance.

HERE is a letter printed without its writer's name. For very good reasons. He is an Army man and it isn't healthy for an Army man to express an honest opinion or cite facts on Army matters, even if his motive is of the best. For example, General

Mitchell and his frank statements about the weakness of the air service that will be asked to shoulder a vital part of the defense if this country is attacked.

I do not know all the facts about the air service, but I do know of one test that proved the efficiency of planes against battleships—and of how the Army bureaucrats hushed up the results. Looks, on the face of things, as if General Mitchell had sacrificed himself for his country as really as if he'd given his life on the firing-line. And as if there might be some bureaucrats in the Army and War Department who are *not* serving this country but their own interests.

The following letter came in response to a speculation of mine at Camp-Fire as to just how many Reds the Bolshevics had worked into the Army. The Bolshevist plan for getting a country is to seize it by force and surprize. The army of that country is perhaps the most important factor to be dealt with when a coup is pulled off. The best way to keep that army from messing up the coup is to work their own men into its ranks gradually until, in the emergency, it will become an ally instead of an enemy.

Have they begun doing this to our Army? How far along are they in their plan? To what extent is the Army already Bolshevist in enlisted personnel? These queries were first raised in my mind by an Army officer closely in touch with the facts. Now here is a letter from another Army man. Read it and consider whether this is a serious matter:

> I should advise any one who has any mistaken ideas about the foreign element in the U. S. Army to visit any one of the garrisons around New York: Forts Wood, Jay, Hamilton, Wadsworth, Totten, Slocum, or any other post on the Atlantic coast for that matter. Let him make a note of the foreign faces he'll see and he'll find them nine out of ten!
>
> Mind you, I don't say all these are Reds, or would not fight for the nation if occasion demanded, but to me there is something wrong when those same nine men would rather talk among themselves in some ungodly foreign chatter than the language of the country they have supposedly adopted.
>
> Farther west, the Army becomes Americanized, but even in the Southwest it contains a liberal sprinkling of—Mexicans! The United States is the Melting Pot of the world, they say. So is its army!

Several questions arise:

(1) Just who is responsible for the admission of such a hugely disproportionate number of foreign-born who still seem more foreign than American?

(2) Do those responsible allow this from mere lack of common sense, or

(3) Are those responsible for it themselves in sympathy with, or paid by, the Bolshevics?

(4) Is anything going to be done about it?

It is worth knowing about. Who can add any data as to U. S. Army personnel *vs.* Bolshevism?

IT'S always with a shudder that I pass a gun letter on to Camp-Fire. Not that guns aren't an interesting subject. Quite the contrary, and that's what makes me shudder, for from experience I know a gun letter will bring in a deluge of more gun letters.

> Fort Worth Texas.
>
> I just read Mr. Raymond Bergin's letter on Colt .45 automatic pistol and there is no doubt but what he knows this gun. He takes two paragraphs explaining the causes of jams and then winds up by saying that nine out of ten jams are caused by carelessness, which admits that said gun might fail ten times, but suppose we only count the one time not caused by carelessness, and that should happen to be the time you needed the gun, and where are you then?
>
> Answer is you are dead—that is unless the other fellow has an automatic that jams at the same time.
>
> A gun is like a chain. Just as good as its weakest link. If a gun has any weakness at all, it is not worth a ——except to bluff with and bluffing may be all right at some games, but gun bluffing is dangerous in some parts of the country.
>
> Now take the Colt's single action .45. It never jams or fails to function just so long as you feed it good ammunition. Drive nails with it, throw it in the water or sand, bust heads with the barrel, then start firing and she will shoot perfectly. All you have to do is to load, cock and fire either one shot or 1000. It's all the same to Betsie. She is made for business and never balks.
>
> I own and have handled both kinds but would not have an automatic on me in a gun country. How are you going to keep an automatic clean in a desert country?—IRA A. THOMPSON.

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Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

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These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

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While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(See Lost Trails in next issue.)

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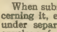

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

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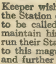

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(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

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QUESTIONS should be sent not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

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2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
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3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the U. S., Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

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24. Africa Part 6 Tripoli

CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

25. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria

(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

26. ✠ Africa Part 8 Sudan

W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

27. Turkey

J. F. EDWARDS, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

28. Asia Minor

(Editor to be appointed.)

29. Bulgaria, Roumania

(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

30. Albania

ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Jugo-Slavia and Greece

LIEUT. WILLIAM JENNA, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel; outdoor life.

32. Scandinavia

ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

33. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland

FRED. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

34. ✠ Great Britain

THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

35. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile

EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

36. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil

PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 360 W. 122nd St., New York, N. Y. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

37. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure*. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

38. Central America

CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

39. Mexico Part 1 Northern

J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

40. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California

C. R. MAHAFFEY, care of Roadmaster, S. P. Co., San Jose, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

41. Mexico Part 3 Southeastern

W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 1303 Euclid St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Federal Territory of Quinta Roo, Yucatan, Campeche. Travel, geography, business conditions, exploration, inhabitants, history and customs.

42. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except **Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin**

S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

43. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario

HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

44. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario

A. D. L. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing; farm locations, wild lands, national parks. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

45. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District

T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

46. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta

(Editor to be appointed.) Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

47. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin

REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

48. ✠ Canada Part 7 Southeastern Quebec

JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

49. Canada Part 8 Newfoundland

C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Avenue, St. Johns, Newfound-

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)
✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

land. Hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography; general information.

50. Canada Part 9 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Is.

Fred L. Bowden, 312 High Street, Newark, N. J. Lumbering, hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography, farming and homesteading; general information.

51. Alaska

Theodore S. Solomons, 6720 Leland Way, Hollywood, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

52. Baffinland and Greenland

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

53. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.

E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

54. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico

H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

55. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.

Frank Middleton, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

56. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.

Fred W. Egleston, 606 West Lamme, Bozeman, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

57. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country

R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

58. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.

J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

59. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.

Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

60. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

61. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

62. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River

Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See section* 64.)

63. Middle Western U. S, Part 5 Great Lakes

H. C. Gardner, 1909 Stout St., Denver, Colo. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.

64. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms. North and East Shores of Lake Mich.

Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.

65. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

66. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville

Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

67. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians

William R. Barbour, care *Adventure*. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

68. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

Hapsburg Liebe, care of *Adventure*. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

69. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine

Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot River. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

70. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine

H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

71. Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., and Mass.

Howard R. Voight, 35 Dawson Ave., West Haven, Conn. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions; history.

72. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey

Francis H. Bent, Jr., Farmingdale, N. J. Topography, hunting, fishing; automobile routes; history; general information.

73. Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland

Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J, Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, care *Adventure*. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Fred. F. Fleischer, care *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, Military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—Navy Matters

Lieut. Francis V. Greene, U. S. N. R., 588 Bergen Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered.

K.-American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, 1244¼ Leighton Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

L.—First Aid on the Trail

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazards of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

M.—Health-Building Outdoors

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

O.—Herpetology

Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

P.—Entomology

Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write Laurence Jordon, care *Adventure.*

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men,** Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. D.

Haiti

LISTEN to a couple of old-timers recalling the days when they chased the wily *caco:*

Request:—"Having been an interested reader of *Adventure* for the last ten years, and having spent, endured, or what you will, three years in Haiti as a member of the Marine Corps, I thought it would be pleasant to write to you to exchange our views on the place.

I know nothing of the mineral resources of Haiti. I was not in the exact position to learn about that. I did a little fishing—never catching anything—shot a few stray chickens, pigs and natives.

All the fruit I saw grew wild. I learned to like the Spanish apples, *zabokas*, figs, quinin oranges and the W. K. mango. As you probably know, most of that stuff grows wild, the 'gooks' only cultivating a small garden wherein they raised a few beans, spuds and *stalles* of corn.

During 1917-18 the H. P. Davis Company of New York cultivated quite a few acres of castor-beans to get the oil for the lubrication of Liberty motors.

As to coffee, it grows wild all over the hills. I have seen, as you have, heap after heap, sacks after sack of it on the water front in Port au Prince and Cape Haitien. I knew one merchant in the Cape, a M. de Catalogne, who had extensive holdings.

Haiti fascinated me. I've heard the throbbing of the drums for five days and nights, out in the bush. I have heard the weird call of the conch-horns from the top of some moon-drenched hill. I have seen the dull-red glow of the watch-fires of the *cacos*. I have heard the gusty-voiced washwomen calling to each other, and singing as they beat the dirt out of clothes resting on a rock in the Artibonite.

While stationed in the Cape I climbed the rough road to the Citadel of Henri Christophe, saw its caverns, galleries and courtyards. Heard the drip of water, the whir of wings, the crawling of hard-bodied creatures over its flagstones.

I have stood on the spot where, to impress a visitor with the rigid discipline enforced, King Christophe marched a company of soldiers to their death, two thousand feet below. I have seen the wondrous view from those mighty towers, rivers, towns and, dim in the distance, the Cape, Quartier Morin and historic Petit Anse.

I hiked from the Cape to Gonaives, passing through Limhe, Gangcock, where we enjoyed immensely a swim in an icy river; Plaisance, where we found the largest grapefruit I've ever seen, and where we could see the frowning barrier of 'Pillsbury.' Ennery very hot, very stony, entirely surrounded by hills, and so into Gonaives, a town of wide well-lighted streets and an immaculate civil prison—and a movie where I saw the 'Burning of Rome' for the fiftieth time more or less. As the subtitles were in Spanish an interpreter was used to read them off in French, which proceeding caused the three piece orchestra (?) to rest at least forty times.

I SPENT three days there and then left for Port au Prince *via* the U. S. S. *Potomac*. I explored the capitol thoroughly in the two months I was there previous to leaving for Mirehalais in the interior. From the city gate on the north to Bizoton, from the docks to the Mountain House. I rode the fire-spitting trolley; I drank *kola* in the Café St. Louis; I endured the odors of the market houses to see what was there; I spent several hours in the huge cathedral, a truly beautiful place when the last rays of the sun enter through the stained windows.

And I've entered the one-horse power taxis at the Caserne Dessalines, gave no directions and was promptly driven to the Chinese restaurant. Entering at the restaurant, giving no directions, I have as promptly been driven back to the Caserne. Fare—what have you?

About the *patois*. I learned it rather well—I had to. I have tried to learn French at the same time and failed. I have always noticed that authors or writers who write of Haiti never use any creole words in their narratives. Why is it? Creole can be written.

I studied French under a very learned black man, C. Jean-Jacques, in his tiny home on the corner of 13th and J in Cape Haitien. The evenings I spent there were enjoyable ones although not so profitable.

In the interior I could stand on the highest mountain and see not a trail I had not hiked over, from Hinché to Saut d'Eau, from Bout Nègre to Las Cahohas.

I've sat all night in the inky blackness of a tropical night staring down a trail, chills on a rampage on my back for fear some tafia-crazed *caco* would slip and *'couper ma tête.'*

I've shivered through the gray dawn on a hill top, wrapped in a blanket soaked the night before when I fought my way through the Artibonite's flood, out on a hike after *cacos*. I have yet to find the quarry awaiting at the end of those long, tiring tramps.

I did not drink the rum or wines nor did I have any *affaires d'amour* with any of the dusky beauties.

Now, after all this junk I hope you will write and tell me some of your experiences in the Black Republic. I will await a reply with great anticipation." —LEONARD E. THOMPSON, Los Angeles, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Emerson:—Glad to have your interesting letter. The mineral resources of Haiti are tremendous, and as soon as the "French colored gentlemen" are all safely buried, just so soon will I go after the said mineral interests, but in the mean time Central America is very much more interesting to me.

The American Chamber of Commerce of Haiti is trying its best to get a move on the country in mining and timber, etc., but by sitting in an armchair at Port-au-Prince, I do not think it can be done very soon.

The natives out in the country do not wish any one to dip into their hills in search of anything, and as you know, some of them are not bluffers.

Enclosed is a monograph on Haiti which I had printed so as to answer the general questions that come in; this you will like to read and file away for future reference.

Am acquainted with the fruits you mention, some of them would sell in New York for large sums, if the fruit could be made safe, and the customers fully appreciate the time and trouble of getting such to New York, Chicago, etc.

Thirty-two years ago some New York men wanted me to take charge of putting a twenty-four-inch gage railway from the north shore in a straight line as possible to Santo Domingo City on the south coast, but after some investigation they found out conditions, and "quit."

Did you meet any of the Haitian border police with their six-foot *macanas* which they use as an "inducement" on the heads of the natives, when it is necessary, which same is quite often.

I have found a place in Honduras where it isn't necessary to use so many .45's, which cost money, and time in the distribution, which takes one away from the surveying instrument.

You know what I mean, for you mention having "heard the drums," etc.

Creole, although it can be written, isn't of enough interest to the readers to pay for going into the translation; thus the publishers save on the linotype expense, and the dear public never know the difference.

You speak of not catching the native you went after; your officer ought to have known that the native telegraph is always just seven jumps ahead of the soldier sent out to catch any one in that country.

You were wise to quit before you began on the subject of the native women, for many of them are "volcanoes" as some of my men found to their sorrow and death. A white man's place is with white people all the time; it sometimes pays big dividends to be good.

I may be in Los Angeles in a few days, and may drop in and see you.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Central American Forests

AN INDUSTRY which awaits development:

Request:—"Will you kindly send me any information you may have regarding tropical forestry, particularly Central America. —C. J. DYER, Jackson Heights, L. I.

Reply, by Mr. Barbour:—It is rather difficult to answer your letter on tropical forestry, especially Central America, because you do not ask specific questions. One could write a volume on the general subject without adequately covering it.

If you are especially interested I would suggest that you secure a copy of the "Timbers of Tropical America," just printed by the Yale University Press. It is the first authoritative book on the subject.

In general, there are three zones of forest growth in Central America. One is in the cordillera, the *tierra fria*, where the growth is pine, fir, etc., merging at lower altitudes into oaks and other temperate zone trees.

On each side of this central zone comes an intermediate zone, the *tierra templada*, in which the oaks etc., are found and are gradually replaced by subtropical trees—mahogany, Spanish cedar, cocobolo (west side only). Balsam of Peru (west side only), logwood and fustic (principally east side) and many others.

These intermediate zones blend into the true tropical growth near the sea coasts, the *tierra caliente*, where mahogany, chicle, logwood, Spanish cedar, mangrove, and a host of other species are found. The jungles in this zone are tangled with lianas, dense underbrush, etc. In certain sections many palms are found.

Lumbering is confined principally to the regions near the sea. The centers of the mahogany industry are at Belize, British Honduras, Puerto Cortez, Honduras, and Bluefields, Nicaragua. A great part of the mahogany and Spanish cedar come to the United States either in the log or squared. Logwood and fustic, dyewoods, come in short logs.

No scientific forestry is practiced in any part of the region, so far, and the forests are not in good condition.

Big Game in Montana

IF YOU hanker after elk, deer or bear, here's your chance:

Request:—"I have hunted at various times in Jackson Hole and on the head of the Yellowstone in Wyoming, but have never hunted in Montana. Am considering a trip during the coming hunting season in that State and would appreciate it if you will give me your opinion on the advantages of a hunt on the West Gallatin River near the Park as against the Yellowstone near Garainer? If the former, what is the best point at which to leave the train?

What are the chances for elk, deer and bear and what special time, if any, should I plan to arrive after the opening of the hunting season? Can you give me the name of a reliable guide for that section and a line or two regarding the kind of outfit which he has? Are there any ranches near the Park which are prepared to take in people for the summer and through the hunting season, so-called "dude ranches?"

Any information which you can give me along the above lines will be greatly appreciated.

If this is published, please omit my name and initials."— —— ——

Reply, by Mr. E. Shaw:—The game situation in the two localities you mention varies widely. The West Gallatin is the more popular hunting country, as elk are more plentiful there than in the country lying east from Garainer. The hunting areas in both sections lie wholly within the National Forests. The Gallatin Forest covers the West Gallatin area and the Absareka Forest, of which I was formerly the Supervisor, and includes the elk country east from Garainer. I shall try and explain the situation so that you may understand it and act in accordance with your own judgement.

The best of the hunting is found either at the opening of the season or at the close of it, on Slough Creek and Hellroaring Creek near the north boundary of the Yellowstone Park and not farther from it than two or three miles.

Hellroaring Creek is about twenty-one miles east of Garainer and Slough Creek is about twenty miles east of Hellroaring. Between these two is Buffalo Fork where elk are sometimes found, but it is fair deer country, black-tail of course.

The great trouble of this section for elk hunting is that the country within the Absareka Forest all slopes in a southerly direction toward the park. All water runs down into the park. Naturally in the late fall, including the hunting season, the natural tendency is for the elk to drift lower down and therefore into the park where, as you know, they are permanently protected.

Toward the close of the hunting season, in December, the old bulls often work back into the higher country within the forest along Hellroaring and Coyote Creeks. At such time the snow is often quite deep and more or less of a handicap, particularly in getting out with your outfit.

The best guide that I know of in that country is Clarence Ryerson of Garainer. He has a good outfit of horses and an excellent camp outfit. He is an old-timer at the game and has handled parties through all of the country surrounding the park and down into the Hole. He would be equally available for the West Gallatin trip.

The topographic situation on the Gallatin is entirely different. There the higher summer elk range lies within the park, and the natural drift in the fall is down the country and out of the park. However, all of the country between the Yellowstone River and the West Gallatin River for a distance of approximately six miles north of and away from the park is reserved from hunting and is the Gallatin Game Preserve.

Naturally the elk are well acquainted with the preserve boundaries and hang up in there after coming from the park. Every year elk are killed in the country outside but near the preserve early in the season, but it is usually late after the heavy snows that the most elk are taken.

However, the hunting season closes on the Gallatin side on November 30, whereas it remains open in the country east from Garainer until mid December. There have been years when the elk drifted out of the park in great numbers and were slaughtered within sight of the town of Garainer, but I judge that such hunting would not appeal to you.

There are several dude ranches in that country. Karst's Ranch on the West Gallatin handles quite a few people in individual tent-camps about fifteen miles, as I now recall it, below the elk country, and the Wilson Ranch somewhat similar, is located at the boundary of the Game Preserve about five miles from the park line.

On the Garainer side of the mountains, James W. Parker has a ranch well back on the slope above Garainer and about five miles from it, from which the Mamouth Hot Springs Terraces can be plainly seen. He is just starting in at the game. Below Garainer, about nine miles on Cedar Creek, J. N. (Dick) Randall has a most attractive and, one might say, luxurious log ranch-house built expressly for handling summer guests. House is of twenty-two rooms, equipped with electric lights and bathrooms and billiard tables. His rates include saddle ponies for use at all times without extra charge. His post-office is Corwin, Montana. The address of the West Gallatin ranches is Salesville, Montana.

You mentioned bear hunting. Of course, you probably know that the fall is not the best time to hunt bruin. Either Randal or Ryerson are quite successful along all lines of big game hunting. Perhaps Randall knows the grizzly game better than most, at least in the Hellroaring country; but it would be hard to discount Ryerson at that. It depends somewhat on how the spring opens up as to the best time to start after grizzly. They den up higher in the mountains and come out later than do the blacks and browns. Unless conditions have greatly changed within the last year, you can reasonably expect to kill a grizzly in the Hellroaring country and probably a black bear on a two week's trip in the spring. Suggest that you correspond with Clarence Ryerson as to the best time for either a spring or fall trip.

You will have no difficulty in finding my place, about twelve miles south of Middleboro, and I shall be glad to see you at any time whenever you care to run down. In a personal talk I can give you a more detailed line on that country. Here's wishing you the best of hunting.

The Scourge of the Pacific

INFLUENZA, most dreaded of diseases in Tahiti:

Request:—"What is the present total population of Tahiti and also how many whites and natives?

What was the date of the influenza epidemic (in Tahiti) and how many in Tahiti died of it?

What are the requirements, if any, for gaining admittance to Tahiti?

Would also like to have some general information on the following topics: Clothing, living conditions, commerce.

If these answers are printed would like to ask that my name not be mentioned."— —— ——

Reply, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.:—The present total population of Tahiti is about 12,000. About three per cent. of this population is white, while from seven to ten per cent. are Chinese. The rest of the population are natives of the Polynesian race.

The influenza epidemic occurred in the latter part of 1918, carrying away fully 4,000 Tahitians. Hector MacQuarrie, who was in Tahiti at this period, describes the whole thing in his "Tahiti Days." And if you have access to numbers of *Adventure* as far back as 1920, you will find in a September issue one of my South Sea tales, "The Fourth Boy," which has to do, in part, with the terrible plague that swept Tahiti and the adjacent islands. Since that time the survivors have never really been the same people. When the epidemic is mentioned, an indescribable sadness comes over them.

An American passport, viséed by a French consul, and a certificate of vaccination are required of all Tahiti visitors. Too, there is a tax of fifty francs, which is paid immediately upon arrival.

The very best of room and board can be obtained in Papeete for $40.00 a month.

Houseboating On the Mississippi

FOUR THOUSAND miles to go, unless you get tangled up with the ferry cables:

Request:—"A friend and myself are going to spend a few months on and about the Mississippi in a power houseboat, and want some dope concerning this method of travel.

We have about two thousand dollars, but naturally wish to get by as cheaply as possible consistent with a reasonable amount of comfort. We are going to start from some point in Minnesota or Iowa, and have a rather vague idea of using the Ford motor as a power plant in the boat; would this be practical?

What would be a rough estimate of the cost of a good safe boat 30x10′.

Is the White River navigable for a light draft boat as far as Eureka Springs, Ark.? If not, how far?

Is there any pearling at the present time along the White River?

I have been told there were very few fish caught in the Mississippi. Is this true? How is fishing in the smaller streams such as the St. Francis, White and Arkansas Rivers?

What is the attitude of the inhabitants along the river toward shantyboaters? The general character of the latter? We are strictly out for an interesting trip and want to miss as few such places as possible, so if you can suggest any side trips that are worth while, do so by all means. We have lots of time, and may stop occasionaly and work if anything shows up."—E. P. Moore, Los Angeles, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Spears:—I don't think you would need a 30x10-foot boat. I'd suggest 24x7.5, with 30-inch hull, instead. The smaller boat handles better, costs a lot less, and you don't need power, floating down stream. An eighteen-foot skiff with an outboard, or small motor would handle the shantyboat, if you worked up eddies. Sweeps—oars—are a lot cheaper, and cut cost of boat a lot if you build yourself, or hire built, especially.

If I were you, I'd start on upper Missouri, at Ft. Benton, or below, in a twenty-foot by seven-foot, or even six-foot, with oars. And a fourteen-foot-long cabin. Build hull of 1½-inch clear lumber, well caulked and framed. 28-30 inches deep, and cabin floor on the bottom stringers. Plenty big enough. An outboard motor would handle all way down. Could run up tributaries. Starting in May—*look out for cables or ferries over the river*—you'd have a great trip, at little cost. Probably work on farms along the bottoms in Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, etc., and earn cost of trip.

Arrive in Lower Mississippi in October-November. Get maps of Missouri and Mississippi from Missouri River Commission, Kansas City, Mo. and Mississippi River Commission, St. Louis, Mo. Missouri-Mississippi would give you 4,000 miles down. It would hold you a while!

Cost of 20-foot shantyboat, probably $100 to $150. Outfit—ropes, oil stove, and cots, blankets, etc., whatever you are mind to buy.

Plenty of fishing for table all way down—you'll have to learn how.

"Cabin Boat Primer," Published by A. R. Harding, Columbus, O., would give you all info' you need.

Don't bother with a power plant in shantyboat. Get an outboard for it.

White River, St. Francis River, all fished out for shells. Could work up them with outboard, if you could get up shallow shoals.

Carry a .25-35 carbine, a shotgun, a .22 rifle for rabbits, etc. But some hunting forbidden.

Lower Mississippi not very hospitable for shantyboaters. But you'd have a fine country—wild—

down the Missouri, a long way. Lower river trapping forbidden through a lot of the country.

Fishing, commercial, is matter of local control. Might strike good down Missouri. Ask along.

Lots of fish in Mississippi—have to know how to get 'em.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose FULL return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Motoring Across the Continent

HERE'S some travel dope from one of our new "A. A." men. Mr. Fred W. Egleston has taken the place of Mr. Chester Davis as expert for Montana and the northern Rocky Mountains. We were darn sorry to lose Mr. Davis, but he had to leave the territory and he himself suggested his successor.

Request:—"A chum and I are going to make a trip through the West this summer. I have had some experience touring and camping. I built up an old Ford to make several trips in the East. The territory we wish to invade is new to me so I am hoping to hear from you in regard to the following questions:

1. What work can be secured along the way?
2. Can you furnish me with an idea of auto laws I will encounter?
3. What equipment would you suggest?
4. Is a fishing license needed in the states you cover?

The above questions refer only to section you cover as I have writen to men covering other sections. We will appreciate any additional information you care to give us."—Clark B. Johnston, Ingram, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Egelston:—Taking up your questions in numerical order:

1. You should be able to pick up considerable work along the way, although there is nothing doing right at this time. Would suggest that you could pick up quite a little money adjusting cars for other tourists, if you are planning your trip during the tourist season. Owing to present conditions it is impossible to give you a more definite answer and would advise that you write later in regard to this matter.

2. The auto laws need not worry you as long as your car is equipped with proper lights and brakes. The legislature now in session is working on a new set of laws so can not advise you as to definite provisions.

3. This depends upon whether you expect to camp or not. If so, a light tent, a couple of heavy blankets each, woolen underwear, flannel shirts, light woolen socks and riding breeches and boots or puttees are advisable. As to cooking utensils, there is an infinite variety available. Personally my equipment would be a tarp or sleeping-bag, heavy double blanket, army mess kit, cup and a coffee pot and water bucket. It would be advisable, however, to carry a tent unless you could lie up in a town during rain storms. You are not likely to encounter the latter in this state in summer.

4. You must have fishing license in this state. You can get a tent which will cover your car and leave room for sleeping as well. This is a good plan. There are a lot of extras which may be had at the tourist supply houses, and your own ideas and pocketbook should guide you in their selection. Personally would not load myself up with a lot of unnecessary junk.

An aluminum set of pails which nest and take up very little room is a handy thing to have. You can get a portable gasoline stove which converts the gasoline into gas before burning. This would be very nice in the eastern country where summer storms are frequent but you need a camp-fire here on summer nights. A portable grill about two or three feet long to place over camp-fire is as good a stove as you need for cooking. This resembles a huge toaster with two legs at each end. These fold when not in use and are to be pushed a short way into the ground for cooking.

It would be well to carry extra brake bands for your car and don't forget your chains.

Hoping that the above will meet your requirements.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Salmon-Fishing Off Vancouver

RIGHT-royal sport:

Request:—"I am expecting to do a considerable amount of fishing during the coming year around the port of Vancouver, that is, in First Narrows and English Bay. I have a good, strong rowboat and would like to try for salmon, and any other fish that may be had in this district. Kindly advise what class of tackle is best for salmon trolling, weight of sinker and general depth of line. What other fish is to be found in this district and what depth?

You would also greatly oblige me by giving the name of a good, reliable fishing tackle co. so that I may write for their catalog.

In the past I have fished in the Prairie River and do not know much of coast fishing."—Edw. G. Poole, Vancouver, B. C.

Reply, by Mr. J. B. Thompson:—The salmon of the coast waters do not respond well to an ordinary fly, but they do to most spinners which are used with stiff-action fly rods or, they respond to the short-bait casting rod with a stiff action when trolled, as at present practised.

Not many years ago, while I was there, I used a double-propeller-shaped spinner, called the tandem spinereno, and one of the popular bass feather minnows. To this I added a ⅝-ounce sinker and had some royal sport. This, without the sinker, on a fly rod brought good results in streams with salmon and also with steelheads and all the large trout of the coast.

Also while I was there many had great success with the ordinary wooden plug used in casting for bass. The groove-headed one with red head and white body seemed by far to do the most business. They trolled with them and many cast them with very heavy salmon rods.

As I continually receive catalogs from American firms I am sending one in which you will find listed the articles I mention.

Here's wishing you a successful fishing season.

The *Santa Maria*

A "INSIDE" dope about Columbus' flaghip:

Request:—"What was the gross or net tonnage of Columbus' flagship? Can you give me a rough description of the interior plan, the length and beam, the draft and a description of the steering gear?

What was an astrolabe?

I don't want to impose on your good nature too much, but would also like similar information regarding a viking galley. I am interested in both cases in the layout of cabin, crew space and galleys.

If this letter is printed please do not use my name—and many thanks to you for any data you may send."— ——

Reply, by Mr. B. Brown:—The *Santa Maria,* the largest of the three ships of Columbus, had a length of keel of 60.68 feet; between perpendiculars 74.12 feet, over all, 93 feet; breadth 25.71 feet. She had a displacement, laden, of 233 tons and the weight of hull was 90.5 tons. The extensive forecastle overhung the stem nearly 12 feet. There was an enormous structure aft, with half and quarter deck above the main deck. There were three masts and a bowsprit, each carrying square sails, except the mizzen which was lateen rigged.

An astrolabe was of many different forms the essential feature being a graduated circle. It was the precursor of the quadrant and later the sextant. In the Century encyclopedia dictionary there is a picture of the astrolabe used by Drake.

There was a viking ship unearthed in Denmark about seventy-five years ago, probably a representative vessel of the class. Her sheer and her lines were like those of a clipper ship, beautifully designed. She was clinker built, with the planking secured to the beams by cords or withes from the roots of trees. She was calked with hair or moss. Beams rested on top of the frames and carried the deck planking. She was steered by a long oar, fixed in place on the starboard side. Had two masts, with square sail hoisted on the yard from the deck. She was pierced for oars below the deck line. There is no information available to me about the layout of cabin, crew space and galleys.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

BEYERSDORFER, ALBERT G. (Sometimes called JOE BUSH.) Left New Orleans during 1921 and was last heard of working in the car shops in Bilboa, C. Z. Was headed for the San Blas country to prospect for gold. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. B. STANALAND, 2334 Royal St., New Orleans, La.

CAMPBELL, ROBERT. Born in and raised near Allegheny, Pa. Last heard from in Mexico about thirty years ago. Height about six feet, weight about 200 lbs., dark hair and eyes, dark moustache. Any information will be appreciated by his daughter-in-law.—Address MRS. D. F. CAMPBELL, R. D. 57, Sharon, Pa.

BRENDLE, JOHN. Lumber man of Twin, Washington. Had friends in Everett and Seattle, Wash. Any information will be appreciated by his niece.—Address MRS. ANNE EVANS, 4062 Sheridam Road, Chicago, Ill.

WALKER, RED. Formerly of 19 Boston Ave., Toronto, Can. Please write to BERT, same address.

GIBBS, EVERETT. Born in Hendricks County, Indiana. Age 53 years, dark hair and eyes. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. J. KING, 1607½ Bellefontaine St., Indianapolis, Ind.

McCALMONT, MARGARET. Was married in 1917. Had one daughter. Lived in Hochelaga, Montreal, when last heard of. Any information will be appreciated by her old friend.—Address MAMIE DONNELLY, care of *Adventure.*

WILLIAMS, THOMAS R. Formerly 8th Service Co. Signal Corps. Write your old pal GEORGE. Still at Independence.

DALEY, JOHN F. Resident of Baltimore, Md. Was first assistant engineer on the S. S. *Cranenest* in 1919. This ship was operated by the United Fruit Co., of New Orleans, La. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HARRY F. CALLAHAN, 814 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

THOMPSON, W. T. Resident of Baltimore, Md. Chief engineer on S. S. *Cranenest* in 1919. This ship was operated by the United Fruit Co., of New Orleans, La. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HARRY F. CALLAHAN, 814 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

PADGETT, JENNINGS A. Please write to your old buddy of the Philippines.—Address C. H. PAXTON, 4457 Oakenwald Ave., Chicago, Ill.

RHODES, C. D. Am M. E. on local paper. Also own 36 acres with Happy Hollow Inn on sleepy old Alabama river. Studio upstairs, 32 by 40, with skylight. Old friend, it was built for you. The door is kept locked, waiting. We're getting old and gray. Bring M. and come live with me. It's all halvers, old friend, all halvers. Will send you money if the world hasn't treated you right. Poor T. is dead.—Address TANK, Selma, Alabama.

T. O. Please write to me.—Address P. O. care of National Grocery Co., Glassport, Pa.

BALDRIDGE, CAPT. Was medical officer for the 15th U. S. Infantry, Tientsin, China in 1919. Any information will be appreciated.—Address THOMAS W. SLATER, 2709 Elm St., Dallas, Texas.

DUFFIELD, HARRY. Served in the Navy during the war. Was at one time on the U. S. S. *Minnesota*. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. W. C. WAY, 1603 N. 23rd St., Lincoln, Nebraska.

CARTER, HENRY B. Left his home in Camanche, Iowa, May 28th 1895. Brown hair and eyes, height 5 feet 6 inches, age 52 years. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—Address MARY T. CARTER, Box 158, Camanche, Iowa.

HAAS, H. Please come home or write me. Baby is very sick.—Address MRS. G. HAAS, 4024 Grand Ave., Milwaukee, Wis.

FRANCE, JAMES. Come home. Everything is settled.—Address HOBART F.

STAFFORD, J. Staff Sgt. Please write. Have something of interest to tell you.—Address SGT. FRANKLYN, 11th Ordnance Co., Schofield Barracks, Honolulu.

TARBELL, ELLIOTT. Formerly of Spokane, Wash. Last heard of in Oakland, Calif. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ANDERS TVEITMOE, Lake Mills, Iowa.

THE following have been inquired for in either the May 20 or June 10, 1925, issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

ABBOTT, W. B.; Baldwin, Harry; Bell, Harry; Blystone, Vernon; Boston, Charles C.; Bowden, Laurence Warren; Bowers, Sarah; Brown, Lennox Denham; Carkeek, Charles; Daughtery, John; Douglas, William; Flack, Isaac M.; Frake, William; Giffs, Everett; Isaac, Maurice; LaChapelle, Ensebe; McLoughlin, Peter; McTurnal, James; Moore, George W.; Nolan, Paul F.; Rance, Andrew; Renard, Claud and Irven; Settle, Samuel; Smith, Robert and Samuel Burns; Steen, Lew (or Stein); Tallman, George; Theal, Arthur; Trostler, Joseph S.; Tucker, Lorenzo; Wilson, Oliver; Worthington, Pvt. Albert Edward.

MISCELLANEOUS—"Batesy" or "Dectsy"; C. F. E.; Michell; Red Potter, Tommy Warson, Robert Burton or any of the old crowd from the Glen or Palisade Ave.; Stinson; Would like to hear from any of my pals in Pittsburgh, Pa. (north side); Ex-marines of 7th Co.; Munroe; W. C. N.; W. Charles.

UNCLAIMED MAIL

BEST, A; Bickley, Robert G; Carleton, Harry; Cates Richard A; Daniels, H. M; Finn, J. A.; Green, E. H.; Henderson, Cecil B.; Henson, Miss Josephine; Kelly, Ray; King, Bruce; Ledvine, Charles, D.; Lymburne, F. C.; Maier, Fred; Miller, Ernest; Nunes, Roland; Nutt, W. D.; Pavelka, Joseph; Schored, H. A.; Robertson, Wm. E.; Smith, F. R.; Spurgis, George; Tindall, Harold; Wilkins, Lee; Univin, V. P.; Verin, Oscar; Young, N. C.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JULY 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial** and the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE GUARDSMAN *L. Paul*
A British soldier in the wild, wild woods.

PARDS Conclusion *Hugh Pendexter*
The Utes have no sympathy for gold-seekers.

CAP'N NOAH TAKES COMMAND *Fairfax Downey*
Animal life on the rolling wave.

WHAT THEY ATE An Article *Bill Adams*
No gluttony on the high seas.

GOOD PAY *Royce Brier*
The desert has its own laws.

STILL
FARTHER
AHEAD

The three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Gordon Young, John Webb, W. Townend, H. Bedford-Jones, Georges Surdez, Thomson Burtis, Everett Saunders, George E. Holt and J. Allan Dunn; and short stories by F. St. Mars, Percy Charles Chandler, Rolf Bennett, S. B. H. Hurst, Nevil Henshaw, Alan LeMay, Fred F. Fleischer, Alanson Skinner, Captain Mansfield, Ralph R. Perry, Michael J. Phillips, Chester T. Crowell and others; stories of gold hunters in California, revolutionists in Haiti, explorers in Borneo, French troopers in Africa, aviators in the oil fields, cowboys on the Western ranges, desert riders in Morocco.

NO CROSS WORDS

or shaving puzzles

……

He uses Razorine!

Happy is the man who has learned about Razorine.

It means the end of dull, "pulling" razors; the death of slow, torturous shaves. For Razorine will quickly make the dullest razor keen.

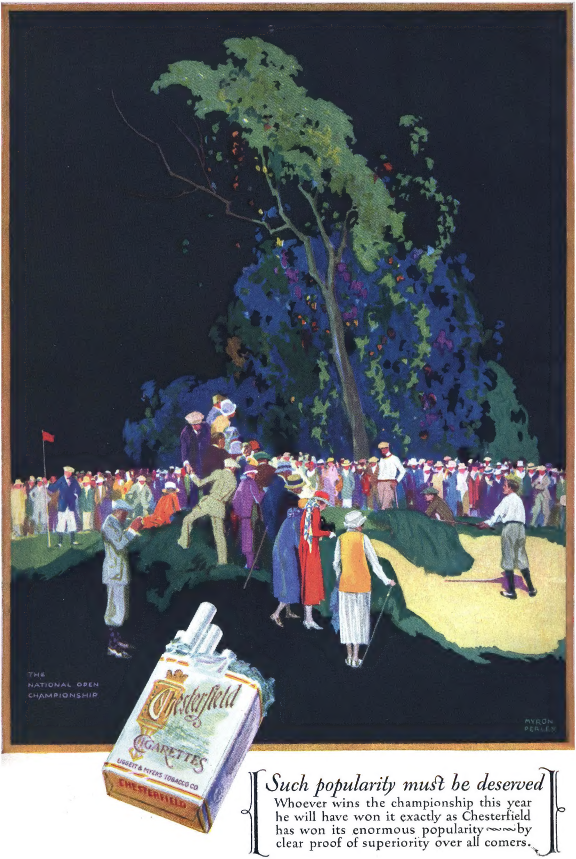
Simply rub Razorine over your strop and strop razor in the usual way. A few strokes is all it takes to bring back the sharpest edge and make your razor velvety smooth.

Razorine sharpens safety razor blades, too. Just rub it on the rollers of the stropping machine and crank away!

One cake of Razorine will last two years. It will not injure strop or blade in any way.

Ask your druggist for Razorine today. Or send 25c for full-sized cake postpaid.

MARDAN CORPORATION
40 West 13th Street New York City


THE NATIONAL OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP
MYRON PERLEY
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CHESTERFIELD

Such popularity must be deserved

Whoever wins the championship this year he will have won it exactly as Chesterfield has won its enormous popularity ~~ by clear proof of superiority over all comers.